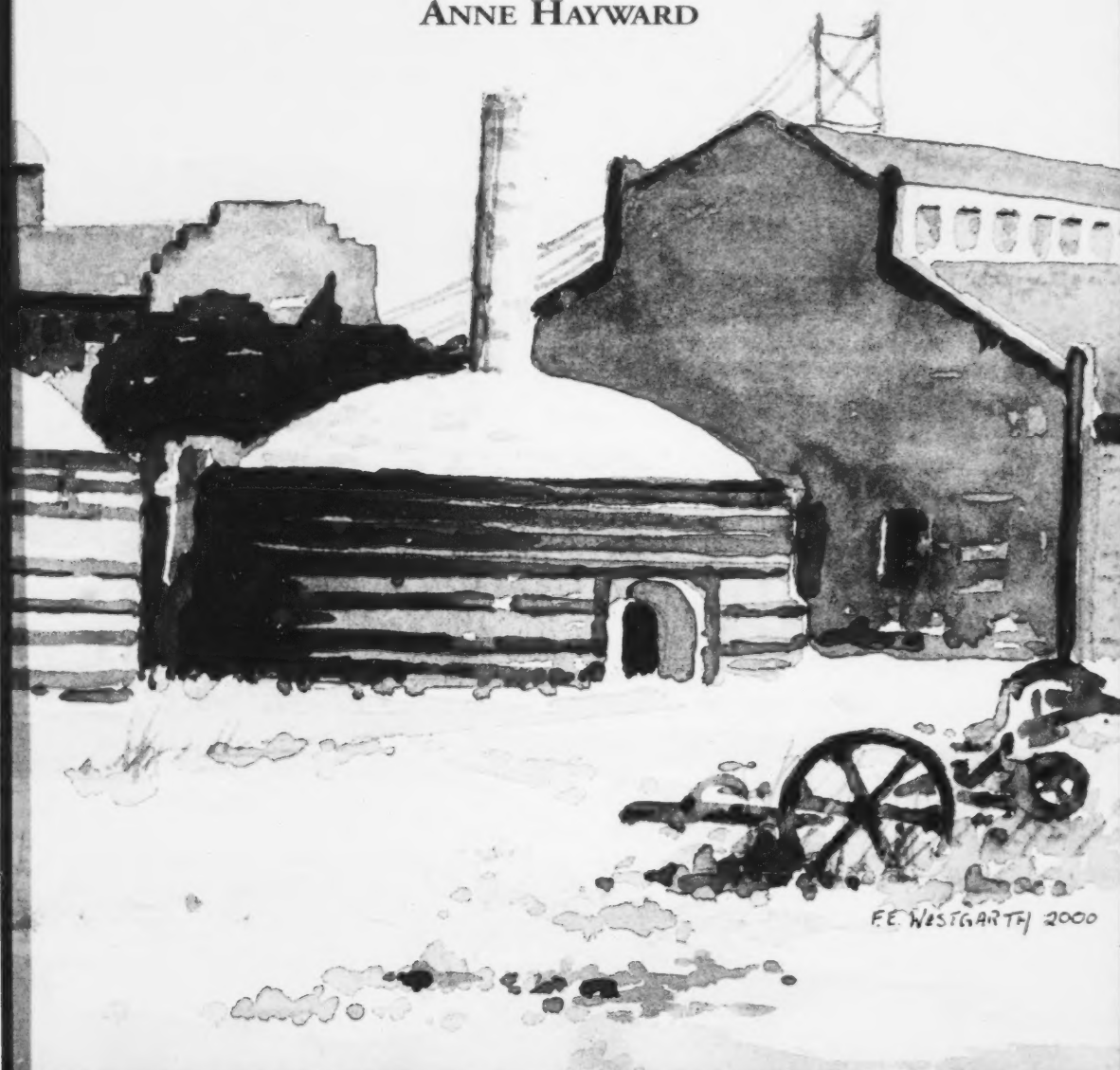


THE ALBERTA POTTERY INDUSTRY, 1912-1990

A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

ANNE HAYWARD



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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Medicine Hat, Alberta as a centre for clay products and pottery was based on the availability of cheap fuel in the form of natural gas, and local deposits of suitable clay. The first pottery was established in 1912, and the height of the industry's development and success lasted from 1915 to 1960. The production of stoneware crockery for the western Canadian market solidified the pottery business, and continued success was achieved through effective marketing and the development of artware and other product lines. The science of ceramic engineering led to increased efficiency, safety, and productivity in the factories. The Depression and the Second World War had considerable impact on labour and production in the pottery industry, affecting working conditions in the factories for almost a decade. During the post-war period, labour relations were stormy, and pottery production in Medicine Hat was crippled by industrial strikes. With the impact of domestic labour unrest, increased foreign competition, and difficulties with the supply of raw materials, the industry declined steadily from 1960 through the 1980s. Medicine Hat's last pottery closed in 1989. As a result of continued collector interest in the products of Alberta's pottery industry, the remaining factory buildings have been reborn as industrial heritage sites.

RÉSUMÉ

Medicine Hat s'est taillé une place comme centre de fabrication d'articles en terre cuite et de poterie grâce à la présence de gaz naturel, combustible peu cher, et de poches de bonne argile. La première manufacture de poterie a été fondée en 1912. L'industrie a été florissante de 1915 à 1960. La production de vaisselle pour le marché canadien de l'Ouest a consolidé le commerce de la poterie et une commercialisation efficace ainsi que la mise en marché d'objets d'art et d'autres produits ont assuré la prospérité de l'industrie. La science du génie céramique a conduit à l'amélioration de l'efficacité, de la sécurité et de la productivité dans les usines. La crise des années 30 et la Seconde Guerre mondiale ont eu d'énormes répercussions sur la main-d'œuvre et la production dans cette industrie. Cela a affecté les conditions de travail dans les usines pendant près de 10 ans. Après la guerre, les relations de travail étaient houleuses et des grèves ont paralysé la production de poterie à Medicine Hat. L'industrie a progressivement décliné, de 1960 aux années 80, en raison de l'agitation ouvrière intérieure, de l'augmentation de la concurrence étrangère et de difficultés d'approvisionnement en matières premières. La dernière poterie de Medicine Hat a fermé ses portes en 1989. À cause de l'intérêt constant qu'ont manifesté les collectionneurs pour les produits de l'industrie de la poterie albertaine, les fabriques qui restaient ont été reconverties en lieux de patrimoine industriel.

FOREWORD

In the "Frontier Resources" gallery of the *Canada Hall*, there is an ongoing, rotating display of Medalta Ware, a major collection in the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the most important line of products studied by Anne Hayward in this fine book.

Our Museum's holding of Alberta clay products numbers upwards of 1,300 pieces, mainly outputs of Medalta Potteries Ltd. For research and display purposes, we have tended to divide these objects by their period of manufacture (as described for us by former Glenbow Museum curator, Ronald Getty): stoneware, 1916-30; artware, 1930-37; domestic ware, 1938-41; hotel china, 1945-54.

The *Canada Hall* is a vast permanent set of environmental, showcase, and interactive exhibits portraying the ordinary people and everyday life of our country during the millennium AD 1000-2000. Visitors simultaneously move up through time and from east to west, finding themselves on one threshold of a new era and region after another. It is an exciting journey and a highly informative experience.

Including Medalta in this national history exhibition resulted from a mutual coincidence of needs: to choose the best possible pioneer icon that portrayed Alberta while finding a proper context to show this very large holding of pottery. The inspiration came from a museum trustee from Calgary, Garry Johnson, who one day asked me, "Where's the oil derrick exhibit?!"

Ultimately we installed a full-scale cable-tool rig of the period 1905-35 to be the centrepiece of the "Frontier Resources" gallery. Such drilling equipment was the main piece of large-scale machinery used worldwide to find both crude oil and natural gas. Since the pottery works in western Canada arose on the gas fields underlying southern Alberta, linking the rig to the pottery in the exhibits was a straightforward and logical curatorial approach. There are other important "Oil and Gas" storyline elements in this gallery, but none more significant than the portrayal of western economic diversification that the Medalta history reveals.

Anne Hayward describes and analyses all facets of this early Alberta manufacturing industry with imagination, clarity, and sensitivity to all sides in the turbulent rise and fall of Alberta's potteries. From the outset of our exhibit planning, I was eager to have a definitive account of Medalta written and published to coincide with opening the gallery. Anne's contribution is precisely what we needed.

Dan Gallacher, Ph.D.
Chief Curator, *Canada Hall*

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CHAPTER 1

Medicine Hat's ceramic industry was founded on the successful combination of clay, gas, and railway transportation. (The Gas City Brick Co. Ltd., about 1920: P525.123, MHM&AG.)

CHAPTER 2

Companies like Medicine Hat Brick and Tile, shown here in this aerial view, located at the foot of the clay banks. (Aerial view, 1935: P 3521.37, MHM&AG.)

The Purmal Brick Company became increasingly prosperous as brick houses became more popular. (The Purmal Brick Co., late 1890s: PC442.72, MHM&AG.)

Alberta Clay Products dominated the brick and tile industry in Medicine Hat. (Alberta Clay Products, 1922: A.467, PAA.)

CHAPTER 3

Medalta's large "Beehive" kilns were fired for production during the spring of 1916. (Medalta Potteries Catalogue, 1924: M5827, Glenbow Archives.)

The Prince of Wales toured the Medalta plant in 1919 during a visit to Medicine Hat. This photograph was used in the company's 1924 catalogue. (Medalta Potteries Catalogue, 1924: M5827, Glenbow Archives.)

This view of Medalta's storage yard shows part of their huge inventory of stoneware crocks. (Medalta Potteries Catalogue, 1924.)

CHAPTER 4

Medalta's sales grew steadily through the 1920s, thanks to marketing strategies like this trade fair display. (Medalta Stoneware Ltd.: P328.270, MHM&AG.)

Once the overburden of rock and soil was removed, horse-drawn scrapers were used to take clay from the deposits. (Horse-drawn clay scraper, clay pit, no date: P442.252, MHM&AG.)

CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

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CHAPTER 8

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CHAPTER 11

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Many colleagues and friends within the museum community have supported the research and development of the present work, notably Daniel Gallacher, Director of History, Canadian Museum of Civilization; Sandra Morton Weizman, Senior Curator of Cultural History, Glenbow Museum; David Jamieson and Audrey Malek, The Friends of Medalta Society, Medicine Hat; Donny White, Director and Lorraine Sept, Archivist, at the Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery. Each contributed resources, information, assistance and advice that helped transform this project from concept to reality.

The facts and figures of economic history were vividly brought to life through numerous interviews with former employees of the pottery factories, and their families. Special thanks to Shirley Albrecht, Charles Butgereit, Jimmie Clennell, Engeline and Reuben Kessler, Basil Leismeister, Luke Lindoe, Ed Phillipson, Rose Stickle, Bill Wyatt, Ted Wyatt, and Bill Yuill. Their experiences contributed materially to the thematic interpretation of the pottery industry presented here.

On a personal note, the present work would have been impossible without the dedicated interest and support of my family. Thanks especially to my husband Doug who shared my curiosity and fuelled my determination; and to Bettianne Hayward, whose generous help allowed me to complete this research while raising our young children. Thanks also to my parents, Neville and Marie Elwood, who nurtured my interest in history, ceramics, and museums.

INTRODUCTION

The manufacture of clay products is an important aspect of Canada's industrial history. "Clay products" is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of ceramic products from bricks, sewer pipe, tiles, and chimney flues to the stoneware crocks and tableware that normally come to mind when one thinks of "ceramics." Ceramics are products made from a nonmetallic mineral compound (especially clay) and fired to set the shape.

Every province has its own heritage of clay products, creating a national history which spans from the mid-seventeenth century to the present. The coarser clay products manufactured for industrial use were typically an important aspect of local economic development throughout Canada. Clays suitable for bricks and pipes were readily available, and it was considerably cheaper to make these heavy wares locally than to ship them from established factories overseas. The high volume of production made clay products economically significant. Brick buildings lined the streets from Halifax to Victoria, and stoneware sewer pipes were laid beneath emerging civic roadscapes.

The production of finer ceramic wares in Canada never achieved the commercial success enjoyed by clay products manufacturers. While many potteries were established, and strong traditions of Canadian pottery production emerged, the industry developed on a much smaller scale and had a comparatively less certain economic viability. This was largely because, in direct opposition to the manufacture of industrial clay products, suitable local clays were scarce and foreign wares could be readily imported for local sale.

The history of clay products in Alberta differs from the more typical Canadian experience outlined above. The manufacture of industrial ceramics in Alberta developed in the late nineteenth century, and a small city in southern Alberta called Medicine Hat quickly became a centre for ceramics production. By 1910 it boasted several factories which turned out bricks, sewer pipes, chimney flues and building tiles to serve all of western Canada. In 1913, the first pottery factory was established. By 1929, a short sixteen years later, Medicine Hat was the centre of Canada's pottery industry, manufacturing 75% of all the wares produced in Canada.¹ The rather startling success of the pottery industry in Medicine Hat merits attention.

Previous histories of Canadian ceramics have focused on pottery produced in Eastern and Central Canada from the mid-seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries.² Because of their temporal mandates, these have tended to leave off just where Medicine Hat's story begins. One earlier text has been written on the subject: *Pottery In Alberta*, an anecdotal narrative compiled largely from interviews.³ The present work, while relying on the fertile ground prepared by these previous studies, attempts to explore Medicine Hat's role in the manufacture of pottery and industrial clay products within the context of Alberta's economic development.

The present study covers the history of pottery production in Medicine Hat from 1912 to 1990, emphasizing the period from 1915 to 1960 which saw the height of the industry's development and success. It focuses on the economic and social impact of

the industry, both locally and nationally. In the tradition of material history studies, it examines the products of the pottery industry, the processes used to manufacture them, and the people who made and used them.

The emergence of Medicine Hat, Alberta as a centre for clay products is closely linked to the town's "boom" years in the early 1900s. Natural gas, initially discovered in 1883, fuelled the development of an industrial economy based on the ready supply of cheap power. Local clay deposits proved suitable for brick and tile manufacture, and paved the way for interested entrepreneurs to investigate commercial pottery production. The first pottery in Medicine Hat was established in 1912.

Pottery production was not an immediate success. It took a number of years to place the industry on a profitable footing. In part, this was because there were remarkably few potters involved in the industry's development. In the absence of this expertise, a basis for successful manufacturing was gradually established through trial and error, supported in turn by an abundant supply of investment capital and raw materials. Success came in the shape of stoneware crockery produced for the western Canadian market, and expanded as the potteries' range of products increased. The development of art wares and other product lines helped broaden the industry's customer base, and greater attention to marketing increased the geographic range of its sales. With time, the developing science of ceramic engineering gained a foothold in Medicine Hat, and focused the industry on efficiency, safety, and productivity.

Pottery wares and manufacturing processes are only part of the industrial equation. The local labour force was a determining factor as well, and it in turn was shaped by international forces like economic depression and world war. In particular, the impact of World War II on labour and production in the pottery industry was considerable, affecting working conditions in the factories for almost a decade. Labour relations in the post-war period were stormy, and industrial strikes crippled pottery production in Medicine Hat.

The industry entered a slow decline from 1960 to 1990. The impact of domestic labour unrest was worsened by increased foreign competition and problems with the supply of raw materials. Alberta's provincial government became increasingly wary of footing the bill for a perennially unprofitable industry, and the last pottery in Medicine Hat finally closed its doors on the death of its owner in 1989.

The products of Alberta's pottery industry are still available at auctions and antique dealers, where they have entered the realm of the "collectible." The economic winds have shifted, and the potteries have entered a new phase: no longer of interest for industrial production, they are gaining a new identity as industrial heritage sites.

The themes briefly touched on here are explored in greater detail in the ensuing chapters. Factors affecting the emergence, success, tribulation and demise of Alberta's pottery production bear examination in the context of the province's economic history. At the same time, the story of Medicine Hat's potteries is rich in human interest: rivalry and espionage amongst the entrepreneurs who founded the factories; successes and failures

of the scientists who struggled to perfect the pottery materials and manufacturing processes; challenges met by the craftspeople who made the wares; and the daily lives of the young men and women who made their first pay cheques or met their life partners in the factories. The pottery industry was a social as well as an economic reality, and the rich primary sources which survived the pottery companies themselves give profound insight into these social and economic contexts. The material evidence of factory buildings, manufacturing equipment, pottery wares, company records, catalogues, photographs, and newspapers is enriched by the memories of people who worked in the plants. Taken together, they build a powerful foundation for understanding and interpreting the unique heritage of Alberta's pottery industry.



CHAPTER 1

THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF ALBERTA'S POTTERY INDUSTRY

The province of Alberta has a rich and varied geography. It reaches from the rolling grasslands of the prairies to the picturesque ranges of the Rocky Mountains, and from the rugged boreal forest of the north to the badlands in the south. Alberta's identity is shaped by this landscape: its history and economy are linked to the forces of geography and nature. The land abounds not only in scenery, but in natural resources which have fostered the development of agriculture, mining, forestry, and industry. Industrial history is closely linked to geography. Landscape yields resources and provides transportation links which determine to what extent industries can develop in a particular location. Alberta's economic history provides a case study in the problems and advantages of a resource-based economy.

Historically, Alberta's economy has been based primarily on its natural resources. The pattern of 'boom and bust' which characterized its economic development resulted from the province's dependence on outside markets. Prices were set in markets thousands of kilometers away, subject to economic and political forces which otherwise would have had no impact on the Canadian prairies. This pattern was established with the fur trade during the eighteenth century, when the price of pelts rose and fell with the tide of European fashion. It continued through the agricultural development of the early 1900s. Grain farmers balanced between prosperity and ruin, their fate dictated by weather and climatic changes, and the prices set on the international market.

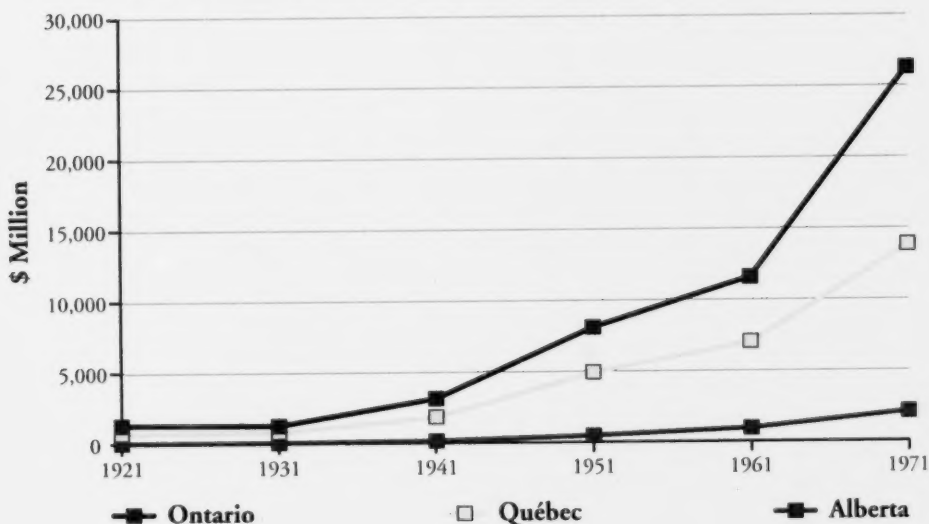
Mining followed the same pattern of development and decline as it rose to prominence in the twentieth century.¹ The coal mines of southern Alberta held a prominent place in the province's economy until 1946, when natural gas and fuel oil supplanted coal for home heating, and the railways changed their engines over from coal to diesel. Alberta could not compete with the United States for the market in Ontario, and the oil industry began absorbing the interest and resources of the provincial government. Crude oil production jumped from an annual total of 8 million barrels in 1934 to an astonishing 60,000 barrels per day in 1951. Over the next two decades the industry continued to grow until the energy crisis of the 1970s. Oilfield development was then essentially controlled by the increasing international influence of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. When prices went up, oilfield exploration exploded and correspondingly evaporated when prices declined in the 1980s.

Dependence on external market forces is one of two major influences which have predominated in Alberta's economic development. The second one is transportation. The

¹Summarized from Warren Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1979) pp. 132-33.

river systems which supported the fur trade provided the prairies' main link to the markets of Upper and Lower Canada. The speed and economy of river transportation were not superseded until the Canadian Pacific Railway spread westward. Completed in 1885, the CPR provided a critical transportation network for the resources of what was then the Northwest Territories. The railway brought in settlers, and shipped out the resources they produced, whether grain from the fertile farm lands or coal from the seams buried in the southern coulees. Of equal importance, the railway provided a means for shipping manufactured goods from eastern Canada into the west. Manufacturing was consequently slow to develop in Alberta (Figure 1), as most commodities could be purchased more easily from factories in Ontario and Québec.²

Figure 1
Value of Manufacturing in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta



Industrial development in Alberta spiked briefly in the settlement boom before World War I, and again with the wartime contracts of World War II. However, manufacturing in Alberta did not develop to a point of major economic significance until after World War II. In 1947, the Alberta Industrial Development Board began forecasting that the province was destined to become an industrial giant. The prediction was based on the movement of large manufacturers in Eastern Canada and the United States as they began to decentralize and expand their operations.³ But the chief appeal offered by Alberta as an

²Figures for manufacturing compiled by Statistics Canada [Statistics reported in D.G.G. Kerr, *Historical Atlas of Canada*, 3rd Ed. (Canada: Nelson & Sons, 1975) p.91].

industrial location was its natural resources. Even as manufacturing became more prominent in Alberta, it tended to focus either on processing raw materials, or on providing custom fabrication for the province's resource-based industries.

Primary industries played a preponderant role in Alberta's economic development. It is therefore somewhat of a surprise to learn that Alberta stood at the forefront of Canada's pottery manufacturing industry for almost half of the twentieth century. In an interesting reversal, Alberta imported raw clay from Saskatchewan and transformed it into finished goods which were marketed throughout Canada. The industry was even able to support some export trade, shipping wares as far afield as New Zealand and Australia.

Alberta's pottery industry developed on the heels of its clay products industry, a broader designation for ceramic manufacture which includes bricks, tiles, pipes and other wares produced primarily for construction. The small city of Medicine Hat, located in the southeastern corner of the province, emerged as the centre of the clay products industry. The city's chief advantage was an abundant supply of natural gas, which provided cheap fuel and utilities for industrial development. Gas was particularly suited for clay products manufacture. It was a clean-burning fuel, unlike coal, and its combustion could be controlled to maintain consistent temperatures.

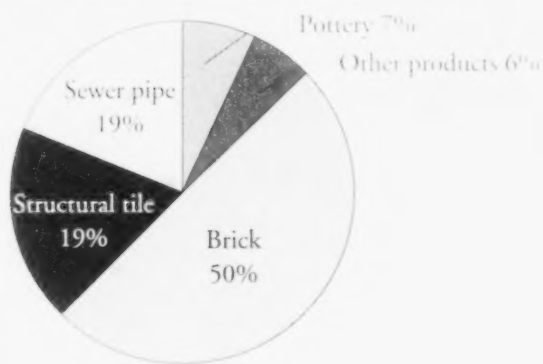


Medicine Hat's ceramic industry was founded on the successful combination of clay, gas, and railway transportation. (The Gas City Brick Co. Ltd., about 1920: P525.123, MHM&AG.)

³ *Calgary Herald* October 17, 1947.

The main products of Canada's ceramic industry were bricks, structural tiles, and sewer pipe. Pottery never represented a major industrial strength even during its most prosperous periods of production, as indicated in the following chart (Figure 2):¹

Figure 2
Products of the Canadian Ceramic Industry, 1941



Clay products manufacturing in Medicine Hat developed into a steady and prosperous industry. However, on a national scale, Alberta's role was not a dramatic one: the province fairly consistently accounted for about one tenth of Canadian production, ranking third after Ontario and Quebec (Figure 3).²

Medicine Hat's pottery industry played a much more prominent role in the national economy. The overall value of the industry was considerably less than that of the clay products industry (Figure 2), but Medicine Hat's contribution was much more significant. The city's pottery plants, active from 1916 to 1989, dominated Canadian production from the 1920s until 1950. In 1928, the first year for which separate figures are available, 75% of the pottery produced in Canada was manufactured by Medalta Potteries Ltd. in Medicine Hat.³ From the midst of the Depression in 1935 until the post-war boom of 1950, Medicine Hat accounted for between 58 and 80% of Canadian pottery production, with an average production ratio over that sixteen-year period of 67% (Figure 4).⁴

¹ Percentages compiled from sales figures for 1941 reported in: *The Clay Product News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVI, No. 3, March 1941, p. 8.

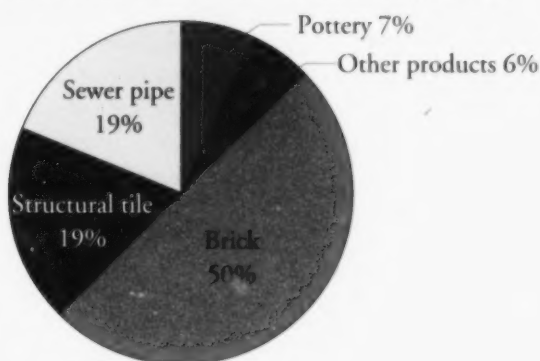
² Percentages compiled from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics reports: *The Clay and Clay Product Industry in Canada from 1932 to 1960*.

³ *The Clay Product News & Ceramic Record* Vol. II, No. 7 (July 1929), p. 1.

⁴ Percentages compiled from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics reports: *The Clay and Clay Product Industry in Canada from 1932 to 1960*. The Bureau maintained separate sales for ceramic manufacturing from Canadian (i.e., and those which used imported clay). The pottery industry in Medicine Hat did not use imported clay, and used clay from deposits in Saskatchewan.

The main products of Canada's ceramic industry were bricks, structural tiles, and sewer pipe. Pottery never represented a major industrial strength even during its most prosperous periods of production, as indicated in the following chart (Figure 2)⁴:

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Clay products manufacturing in Medicine Hat developed into a steady and prosperous industry. However, on a national scale, Alberta's role was not a dramatic one: the province fairly consistently accounted for about one tenth of Canadian production, ranking third after Ontario and Québec (Figure 3).⁵

Medicine Hat's pottery industry played a much more prominent role in the national economy. The overall value of the industry was considerably less than that of the clay products industry (Figure 2), but Medicine Hat's contribution was much more significant. The city's pottery plants, active from 1916 to 1989, dominated Canadian production from the 1920s until 1950. In 1928, the first year for which separate figures are available, 75% of the pottery produced in Canada was manufactured by Medalta Potteries Ltd. in Medicine Hat.⁶ From the midst of the Depression in 1935 until the post-war boom of 1950, Medicine Hat accounted for between 58 and 80% of Canadian pottery production, with an average production ratio over that sixteen-year period of 67% (Figure 4).⁷

⁴Percentages compiled from sales figures for 1941 reported in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVI, No. 3 (March 1943), p.8.

⁵Percentages compiled from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics reports, *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada*, from 1932 to 1960.

⁶*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. II, No. 7 (July 1929), p.1.

⁷Percentages compiled from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics reports, *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada*, from 1932 to 1960. The Bureau maintained separate tallies for factories manufacturing pottery from Canadian clays, and those which used imported clays. The pottery industry in Medicine Hat fell into the former category, as it used clays from deposits in Saskatchewan.

Figure 3
Canadian Clay Products Industry, 1925-1959

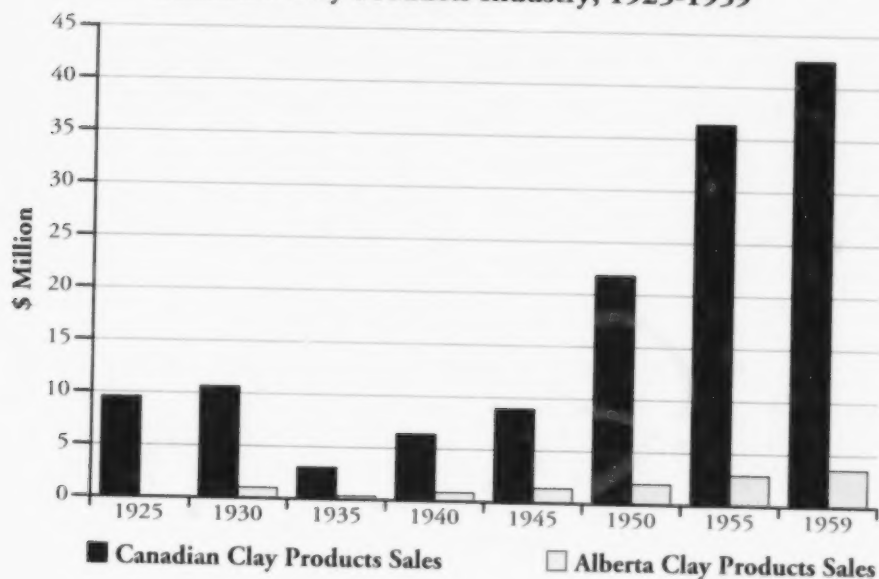
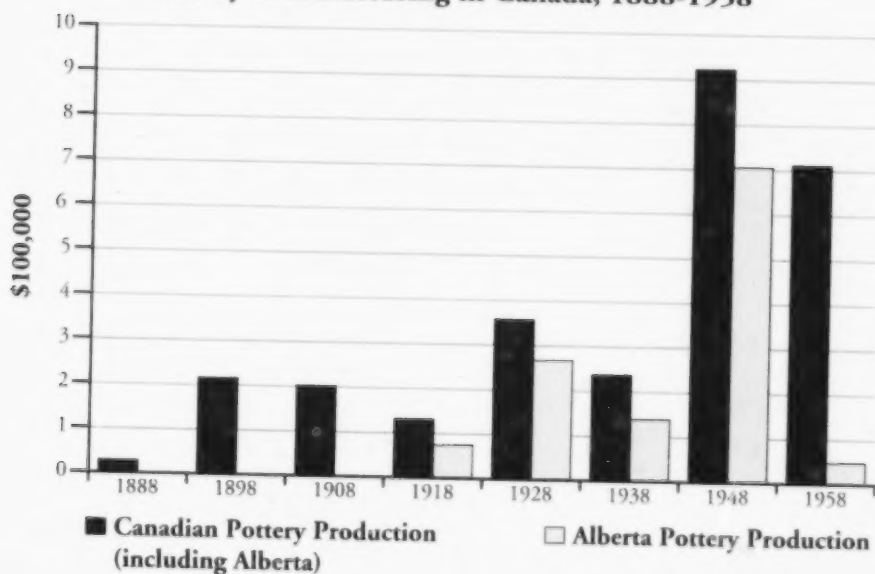


Figure 4
Pottery Manufacturing in Canada, 1888-1958



Central and eastern Canada had longer traditions of pottery manufacturing, with well-established industries flourishing throughout the nineteenth century in Ontario and Québec. However, these provinces suffered a depression in the pottery trade which saw their industry decline at the onset of the twentieth century, just before Alberta's potteries began to take root. Within two years of entering the industrial arena, Alberta was able to eclipse production in the rest of Canada. As the chart above (Figure 4) indicates, Alberta accounted for over two thirds of the pottery produced in the whole of Canada when Medicine Hat's industry was at its height.⁸ However, where the industry experienced a decline of about 25% throughout the rest of Canada in the decade following World War II, it was essentially obliterated in Medicine Hat. In 1959 the province accounted for just over 1% of Canadian production.

The ceramics industry went through a major shift in the 1960s.⁹ The advent of specialized concretes and plastics wiped out products like ceramic sewer pipe and stoneware containers. Increasingly, ceramic materials were adapted for sophisticated use in electronics and aeronautics. The ability of clay to withstand extreme heat became its most useful characteristic in these new industrial applications. By 1968, Canadian production escalated to an unprecedented height of over \$2 million.¹⁰ Alberta by that point was barely a contributing factor in the industry's success.

The following pages chronicle the pottery industry of Medicine Hat in the broad economic and historical context outlined in this prologue. The geographic place which supported the potteries is examined along with the products of the industry, the processes of pottery manufacture, and the people who worked in the factories. From beginning to end, the industry represented a dream of commercial success. Pottery seemed like the perfect industry for Medicine Hat. High quality clays and cheap natural gas were locally available. The Canadian Pacific Railway ran right through the city. But industries depend on more than raw materials and transportation, as the dreamers discovered.

⁸These ratios are based on statistics for pottery manufactured from domestic clays.

⁹"Claims Ceramics Aiding Space Age," *Hamilton Spectator* February 15, 1962.

¹⁰*Clay Products Manufacturers (Domestic)*. Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Industry and Merchandising Division, 1970.

INDUSTRIAL BEGINNINGS

Medicine Hat owes its industrial origins in large part to the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR went through the southern part of the Northwest Territories in 1882, reaching as far as Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. A small tent town developed to the west around the present site of Medicine Hat as people gathered to await the arrival of railway construction in the spring. On June 10, 1883 the first train steamed through, and soon brought lumber for wooden houses to replace the tents. The community grew quickly, incorporating as a town in 1899 and as a city in 1906. By 1912 the population had reached almost 12,000. Strategically located between Winnipeg and Vancouver, the CPR selected the community as an ideal location for its Divisional Headquarters. With almost 1100 kilometers of track within the city limits, Medicine Hat had the longest railway mileage of any CPR division in Canada.¹ The frequent service and extensive connections offered by the CPR attracted industries to locate in Medicine Hat. It soon became the largest distribution centre in western Canada and, as a recognized manufacturing city, received specially discounted rates from the CPR.²

What Medicine Hat did not owe to the CPR, it owed to its own geology – and indirectly to the railway. Natural gas was discovered in 1883 when the CPR struck a small flow of gas while drilling for water.³ Gas was initially used to pump water into the tanks which supplied the CPR engines, and gas jets were discovered continuously and accidentally as wells were bored or shafts sunk for other purposes.⁴ But the commercial significance of natural gas did not become clear until a large well was struck in June, 1904. "Eureka We Have Found It!" the *Medicine Hat News* proclaimed on its front page on June 16. "There is no doubt now but that Medicine Hat will become the manufacturing centre of the west." The discovery fuelled an industrial boom in the city for the next decade.

What was the significance of natural gas for manufacturers? There was no shortage of willing orators in Medicine Hat to spell this out for anyone who cared to listen. In a word, gas provided cheap power. Most industrial concerns at the time were powered by coal, at an average cost of \$3.50 per ton.⁵ A moderate-sized plant operating on 200 horsepower could expect to spend \$4,500 a year on fuel, with an additional \$2,500 to cover salaries for an engineer and fireman as well as incidentals, interest, and depreciation.

¹George A. Yackulic, "Western Industrial Communities – Medicine Hat, Alberta." *Western Business and Industry* Vol. 19, No. 47 (July 1945) p.19.

²Instructions to Agents Selling Stock in the Medalta Potteries Ltd., n. d., ca.1922. (PAA 69.235/215).

³*Medicine Hat News*, February 15, 1913.

⁴*Medicine Hat News*, February 1, 1889.

⁵Figures are taken from "The Cost of Power," presented by L.G. Reid, Consulting Engineer, to the Canadian Manufacturers' Association Annual Meeting, September 24-27, 1907. Reported by J.T. Hall, Publicity Commissioner for the CMA in the *Medicine Hat News*, December 19, 1907.

\$7000 was a considerable sum of money, equal to the net profits on \$75,000 to \$100,000 worth of finished products. In Medicine Hat, the \$4,500 which would have been spent on coal could be invested in drilling a 1,000 foot well. This would supply a factory with power "in perpetuity" the city promised at the time, at no cost other than that of sinking the well.⁶ According to the city's policy, if a manufacturer paid for a well on his site, there was no charge for the gas which the well supplied.

Alternatively, factories could choose to circumvent the cost of the well and purchase their gas supply directly from the city. Domestic consumers paid 13¹/₂¢ per 1,000 cubic feet, but industries investing \$10,000 and employing ten or more people paid the manufacturers' rate of only five cents.⁷ The same moderate-sized plant which spent \$4,500 annually on coal could expect to pay \$480 a year on gas. If more persuasion was required, manufacturers were invited to consider the following facts:

No stokers are required, no coal being freighted from mines to be used under your boilers, and no ashes or refuse to be carted away. You are able to utilize every foot of gas that you pay for, and you only pay for what you use... [Gas] gives you the three great essentials for industrial production, namely heat, light and power – the same commodity that drives your engine heats and lights your building.⁸

As to the certainty of supply, the *Medicine Hat News* was happy to report by 1909 that the city's gas came from "a formation which assures a supply in the Medicine Hat field for practically all time to come."⁹ The gas field, which lay at a depth of between 1,000 and 2,000 feet, was estimated to measure 150 square miles. Its sheer abundance allowed the city "extravagances that make gas users in other cities hold up their hands in horror," the most famous of which was that street lights in Medicine Hat stayed lit day and night as it was cheaper to keep them burning than to pay someone to turn them off.¹⁰

Gas was critical to Medicine Hat's development. Without it, residents were aware that their city "would not be the hustling industrial centre that it is but... would possibly be a railway and ranching centre of two or three thousand people."¹¹ Medicine Hat's industrial economy developed on the basis of cheap power, and natural gas was the principal guarantee of the city's importance and prosperity. The boom which started in 1905 escalated as the city's potential for "wonderful industrial manufacturing progress" captured the imaginations of civic boosters, creating a burst of industrial development between 1910 and 1914.¹²

⁶ *Medicine Hat News*, February 15, 1913.

⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, December 19, 1907.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ January 21, 1909.

¹⁰ *Medicine Hat News*, February 15, 1913.

¹¹ Yackulic, *op. cit.* p.19.

¹² "All About Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada," London: Freeholds of Canada Corporation, 1912 (Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery, MANS 76.4.12).

Mills and factories sprang up in the city's industrial districts along streets with names like Railway, Tractor, Industrial, Steel, Factory, and Clay. Woollen mills, greenhouses, foundries, glass manufacturers, breweries, flour mills, machine companies – even a crayon manufacturing company: all were enticed by the city's offers of free building sites, free water, tax concessions and cheap gas. The boom established Medicine Hat as the early industrial centre of Alberta, and helped create the city's entrepreneurial identity.

THE CLAY PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

Many industries started up in Medicine Hat prior to 1914, but one of the few to survive the turbulent economy and labour shortages created by World War I was the manufacture of clay products. The main products of the industry – brick, tile, and sewer pipe – supplied the massive construction business that followed on the heels of western immigration. High demand for these products assured employment and economic stability for the city.

Like other industries in Medicine Hat, clay products plants benefitted from the advantages of natural gas, notably that cheap gas reduced the cost of basic utilities. But the principal expense in manufacturing clay products was that of maintaining a heat source capable of hardening pliable clay into vitrified ceramic. Natural gas provided reliable, consistent heat at the intensely high temperatures needed for firing the kilns. The fact that it was also inexpensive made it even more attractive. As one promotional pamphlet exclaimed, bricks could be fired “at practically no cost.”¹³ The availability of gas made clay products one of Medicine Hat's earliest and most successful industries.

Medicine Hat's other natural advantage for the clay products industry was an abundant supply of clay. The South Saskatchewan River which wound gracefully through the lowlands of Medicine Hat deposited alluvial silt along its banks for countless centuries, creating rich deposits of clay. As early as 1885, these clays were tested for their brick making potential and found to be of excellent quality. “Were the manufacturing of brick commenced,” wrote the Editor of the *Medicine Hat News* prophetically in that year, “there's 'millions in it' for some energetic individuals.”¹⁴ Continued testing only served to confirm the value of Medicine Hat's clay beds, and the first brick yard appeared in 1886. The industry slowly grew over the next twenty years, and in 1907 reached a level of unprecedented activity. Four new companies opened up in one year, representing an investment of a quarter of a million dollars.¹⁵ The success of the industry prompted the *News'* Editor to observe, “With the clay, fuel and power why should Medicine Hat not make the pressed brick, common brick, sewer pipe, tile and cement for the whole west.”¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ December 10, 1885.

¹⁵ *Medicine Hat News*, December 19, 1907.

¹⁶ Editor, *Medicine Hat News*, May 2, 1907.

The largest brick yard was established in the neighbouring community of Redcliff, some 15 kilometers west of Medicine Hat. Dr. R.R. Stoner founded the Red Cliff Brick Company in 1907, with its headquarters in his home town of Minneapolis. Over \$100,000 was invested in the plant, which included a brick works and mining operations for both clay and coal. The first kiln load of bricks was fired in April, 1908 after which the company proceeded to turn out 40,000 bricks a day.¹⁷ The company's operations were described as "very extensive and of great benefit to Medicine Hat if the results are up to anticipation."¹⁸

The Red Cliff Brick Company, and the industry it represented, gained wider notice than that of the local paper. Rudyard Kipling, noted British author, toured through western Canada in 1908 and visited Stoner's factory and mines in Redcliff. His vivid description of the conversation there captures the unique mix of informality and largesse which characterizes the entrepreneurial spirit of the west:

Between laughter and digressions, they talked over projects for building, first their own, and then other cities, in brick of all sorts; giving figures of output and expenses that would make one gasp. To the eye the affair was no more than a delicious or novel picnic. What it actually meant was a committee to change the material of civilization for a hundred miles around.¹⁹

Medicine Hat and Redcliff formed the centre of Alberta's clay products industry. The abundant natural resources of clay and gas equipped the communities to survive the economic vagaries and depressions which brought down many small brick yards in other parts of the province. Of the many clay products factories which established in Medicine Hat, the two which dominated the industry were the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company, and the Alberta Clay Products Company. One began as a small, family-run business, while the other was a large operation from the start, financed with American capital.

MEDICINE HAT BRICK & TILE ♦

The history of the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company follows a convoluted trail, with many changes in ownership and management.²⁰ The company was situated on the site of Medicine Hat's first brick yard, one of the most desirable locations in the area:

¹⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, April 16, 1908.

¹⁸ *Medicine Hat News*, April 9, 1908.

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, "The Town That Was Born Lucky," *Collier's Weekly*, reprinted in the *Medicine Hat News*, April 23, 1908.

²⁰ The synopsis which follows, except where otherwise noted, is summarized from "Medicine Hat Brick and Tile Ltd. Celebrates 50th Year of Operations," (*Medicine Hat News*, October 1, 1963), and from Jack Manson's *Bricks in Alberta* (Edmonton: Author, 1983), pp.55-61.

Behind [the plant] and towering high above it only ten feet away rises the gigantic clay bank. No transportation by rail, scarcely any need of trucking. The clay can be shovelled right into the mixer at one end, to come out of the press as brick at the other.²¹

The original yard was founded in 1886 by Ben McCord who offered bricks "unsurpassed in quality" for \$12 to \$15 per thousand.²² McCord's bricks were used to build the first school house in Medicine Hat in 1887, as well as several prominent residences. The plant was taken over in the 1890s by two brothers, Charles and Jacob Purmal, who



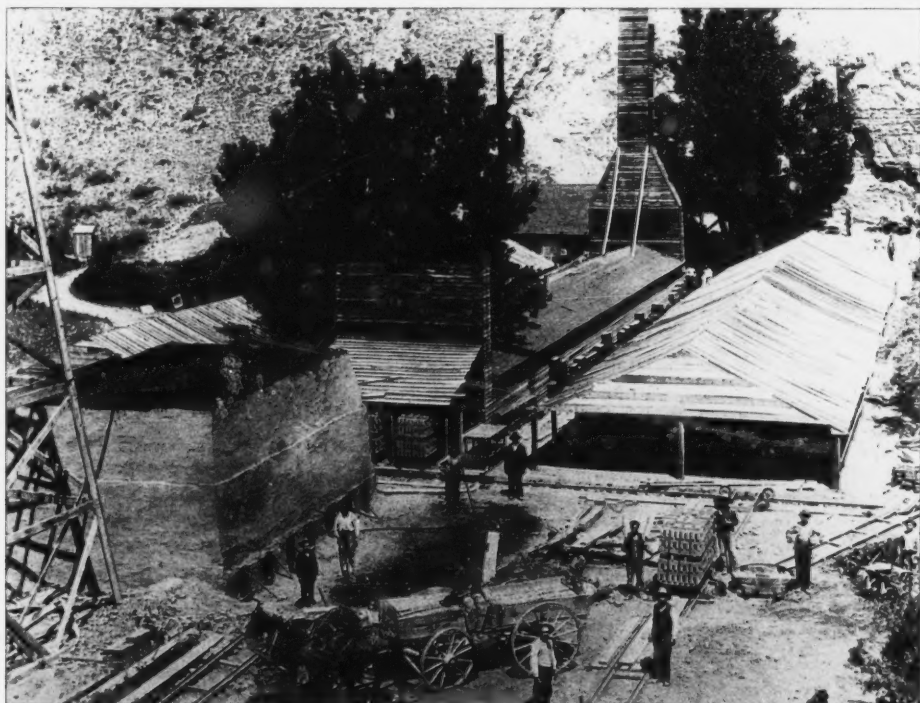
Companies like Medicine Hat Brick and Tile, shown here in this aerial view, located at the foot of the clay banks. (Aerial view, 1935: P 3521.37, MHM&AG.)

²¹ *Medicine Hat News*, August 11, 1909.

²² *Medicine Hat News*, August 28, 1886.

renamed it the Purmal Brick Company. Bricks produced by the Purmal brothers were at first used only for chimneys, but as brick houses became more popular the company's business improved. In 1907 they joined forces with Llewellyn Pruitt, a Texan who had set up a brick yard in Medicine Hat, and together they enlarged and modernized the factory.²³ When Jacob died in 1911, Charles sold his interest in the company to Pruitt.

The company continued to expand and by 1912, employed 75 men and had a production capacity of 200,000 bricks per day. Planned enlargements were to double the plant's capacity.²⁴ However, despite a surge in the construction industry at this time, the plant was forced to close in 1912. A move to reorganize the company in 1915 was pre-empted by a federal government order which closed all factories not directly engaged in war production. The plant did not resume operations until 1920, this time under the name of the Gas City Clay Products Company. The year 1924 saw a further reorganization, with all outstanding mortgages converted to bond issues and another name change to



The Purmal Brick Company became increasingly prosperous as brick houses became more popular. (The Purmal Brick Co., late 1890s: PC442.72, MHM&AG.)

²³Manson, *op. cit.*, p.57.

²⁴"We Sell the Earth: F.M. Ginther Land Co., Medicine Hat Alberta" (PAA 69.235/1).

the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company. A disastrous fire in 1925 caused \$100,000 in damages, and forced the plant to close down once more. The company struggled to its feet again, and was purchased in 1929 by Herbert J. Sissons. At the time, Sissons already owned the Redcliff Pressed Brick Company which he had founded in 1912. With the acquisition of the brick and tile plant, he moved his head office from Redcliff to Medicine Hat. The company remained in his hands, and subsequently those of his three sons Tom, Jack and Gordon. Under the Sissons, the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company became one of the industry leaders in western Canada, and was "numbered among the more progressive clay product manufacturers of Western Canada."²⁵

Other than a multiplicity of names and dates, the preceding history illustrates three salient features of the clay products industry in Medicine Hat. First, the presence of cheap and readily available natural resources was not a guarantee of industrial success. From Ben McCord to Herbert Sissons, the sources for clay and gas remained unchanged. Yet the company pitched on a sea of economic influences which all but capsized the plant during its first four decades of production. It is tempting to think that industrial development followed a rosy path in Medicine Hat, given the many natural advantages touted by the city's boosters, but this is clearly not the case.

Secondly, the crippling hazard of industrial fire was a major setback in the clay products industry. The kilns presented a considerable risk because of the lengthy firing cycles, and many plants were damaged or destroyed by fires. Typically, insurance seemed to cover only half the value of the loss, presumably because premiums were elevated in relation to the increased risk.²⁶

Finally, strong leadership was a key factor in creating a successful venture. While this might seem to be a truism, the importance of strong direction appears to have had an exaggerated significance in Medicine Hat's industrial development. In reviewing the community's history, even from its earliest stages, one is left with a distinct impression of political gridlock. Every possible topic which could conceivably – and unnecessarily – be debated seems to have polarized the community: arguments over changing the city's name long after the community had already become a landmark; repeated plebiscites over civic incorporation when a corporate body was urgently required for industrial development; squabbles over concessions to industries when negotiations were virtually completed – the list extends almost indefinitely. In order to navigate the city's politics, it was essential for any industry to have clear command of its own goals. Whether by coincidence or design, the most successful factories were run by families: perhaps their inherent hierarchical structure created the stability required for progress.

²⁵W.G. Worcester to Herbert J. Sissons, December 23, 1932 (U of S Archives MG 32S1 Accn. 73-6).

²⁶Reports of industrial fires in the *Medicine Hat News* consistently listed damages at half the insured value; see, for example, July 2, 1908: "Disastrous Fire at the Red Cliffs... Loss is estimated at \$50,000 with \$25,000 Insurance."

ALBERTA CLAY PRODUCTS

The history of the Alberta Clay Products Company reads quite differently from that of the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company. Where the latter started off on a small scale and narrowly survived numerous changes in ownership and management, Alberta Clay Products was from the start a huge capital venture. And although it was founded by a syndicate, the company was rapidly taken over by one of the original investors and remained in the hands of himself and his family throughout its most productive years.

In August of 1908, M. E. Newell of the Chicago & Great Western Railway Co. constructed a test kiln at Pural's Brick Yard in Medicine Hat. His object was to examine clay samples along the Crow's Nest line as far west as Fort Macleod and then north to Edmonton. Samples which proved promising would then be forwarded to the Lehigh Clay Products Company in Iowa for further testing. He had already obtained samples of every known clay deposit on the CPR and CNR lines from Ontario through Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and eastern Alberta. Newell planned to start up a clay products plant for manufacturing sewer pipe, and was looking for the optimum location. What he found in Medicine Hat was an abundant source of clay which tested "equal in tensile strength and finish to any pipe now on the market."²⁷

Warren Overpack, Newell's associate in the venture and a native of Webster City, Iowa, met with Medicine Hat City Council in November, 1908 to discuss the prospective sewer pipe factory. Overpack felt that Medicine Hat possessed the ideal essentials of a manufacturing centre: cheap fuel and power, convenient transportation, and ample deposits of first-class clay for manufacturing. Representing the interests of a group of American investors, Overpack promised a planned expenditure of \$150,000 in buildings and capital, and year-round employment for 60 to 100 men. Council responded with an offer of 40 acres of land, a gas well drilled on site, and a fifteen-year tax exemption.²⁸

Although this initial agreement was quickly reached, it took several months to finalize the negotiations. Securing an appropriate land site took three separate efforts on the part of City Council: the first site did not have rail access and Overpack could not negotiate a spur line with the CPR; and the second one did not have enough level land to accommodate the plant.²⁹ The citizens of Medicine Hat were evidently anxious to see the matter resolved to the new company's satisfaction. M. E. Newell, President of the fledgling Alberta Clay Products Company, wrote a letter to the Mayor which was reprinted in the *Medicine Hat News*:

²⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, November 12, 1908.

²⁸ *Medicine Hat News*, November 26, 1908.

²⁹ *Medicine Hat News* November 26, 1908 and May 6, 1909.

I understand there is considerable uneasiness felt by your citizens as to when we are coming to Medicine Hat. For your information, I will say that the proposition on which we are working is of such magnitude that it requires considerable time to work out all the details preparatory to starting the actual construction.³⁰

An agreement was finally reached on September 28, 1909 when Overpack and other associates of Alberta Clay Products came to Medicine Hat to meet with the Mayor and Council. A petition signed by 200 residents pledged support for a by-law granting twelve acres of land to the company, including the city's Athletic Park, as well as a further seven acres adjoining to be purchased for \$7,000 from Mr. F. F. Fatt, the City's Secretary-Treasurer.³¹

Construction began in November, 1909 with every brick used being manufactured on the premises. The plant complex was enormous, with fourteen round downdraft kilns surrounding a four-storey main building measuring 256 by 80 feet. The factory was equipped to produce brick, building tile, and sewer pipe.³² Production started in the fall of 1910 when, months before the completion of the premises, the company began shipping five carloads of brick daily out of the city.³³ The plant went into full operation in November 1911, working twenty-one hours a day.³⁴ By 1912, it was the largest clay products plant in Canada, employing 200 men for wages amounting to \$75,000 annually.³⁵ The company manufactured one million bricks a month, in addition to tiles and other ceramic construction materials, and shipped them from Winnipeg to Vancouver.³⁶

The success of the Alberta Clay Products Company drew considerable interest elsewhere in Canada and further afield. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Alberta Premier Sifton visited the site with a group of political and business leaders about 1910, followed by a delegation of British investors in 1912 who represented an estimated £250,000,000.³⁷

Alberta Clay Products owed its origins to American capital, and to the experience and confidence of the Iowa group represented by Warren Overpack. Left to its own devices, it is unlikely that the community of Medicine Hat would have initiated an industrial enterprise on the scale of the Alberta Clay Products. As the *Medicine Hat News* pointed out after the fact, "there were hundreds of croakers who could not foresee success and... made dismal prophecies" regarding the venture.³⁸ The principal exception to this

³⁰March 25, 1909.

³¹Special Council Meeting, October 11, 1909, Medicine Hat *City Council Minutes*.

³²Medicine Hat Board of Trade, *Medicine Hat, Alberta* 1910, p. 37 (Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery Archives, M91.25.7).

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Medicine Hat News*, February 15, 1913.

³⁵"We Sell the Earth: F.M. Ginther Land Co., Medicine Hat Alberta" (PAA 69.235/1).

³⁶*Medicine Hat News*, February 15, 1913.

³⁷Photograph (PC525.121) and postcard (PC18.10), Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery.

³⁸*Medicine Hat News*, February 15, 1913.

characterization was Harry C. Yuill, whose motto was "Put Medicine Hat-made money back to work in Medicine Hat."³⁹ Yuill came to Medicine Hat in 1884 from Nova Scotia, and built his wealth during the real estate and construction boom before 1914. One of the principal stock holders in the Alberta Clay Products, he purchased control of the company in 1919.⁴⁰

Over the next decade, the company capitalized on unprecedented demand and prosperity in the Canadian clay products industry. The need for brick and tile in the developing western provinces continued to grow, and 1928 saw a record season for the Alberta Clay Products. The largest staff in the company's history was fully engaged in production, and still the company had trouble staying ahead of the demand: a report for that year stated "so many orders have been received that current production cannot keep up with them."⁴¹

The first stage of the clay products industry in Medicine Hat draws to a close in 1929. Over the course of five decades, the industry had grown from a single brick yard in 1886 to include numerous factories of various sizes producing a range of ceramic products in earthenware and stoneware clays. Medicine Hat supplied markets throughout western Canada, despite the fact that local brick making operations started up across the prairies and British Columbia in this period. Low production costs countered the otherwise



Alberta Clay Products dominated the brick and tile industry in Medicine Hat. (Alberta Clay Products, 1922: A.467, PAA.)

³⁹Yackulic, *op. cit.* p.28.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. I, No. 8 (November 1928), p. 1.

heavy shipping expenses, and allowed Medicine Hat manufacturers a wide distribution for their products. The industry was prosperous, accounting for approximately one tenth of overall Canadian production.⁴² However, the record business of 1929 ushered in a decade of struggle: the economic collapse of the Depression took its toll on the clay products industry, and Alberta sales figures dropped from \$1.3 million in 1929 to a low of under \$200,000 in 1933. After an arduous climb, sales finally returned to pre-Depression levels at the end of World War II.

One central aspect of the clay products industry has not yet been discussed. Pottery manufacture began in Medicine Hat in the midst of this initial stage of the industry's development. Twenty-seven years after Ben McCord made his first brick, the city's first pottery plant set up in 1912 to manufacture stoneware crocks and jugs. And where Medicine Hat's clay products represented a fairly consistent 10% of Canadian production right through to the 1950s, its pottery sales accounted for as much as 80% of the national total in the same period. Medicine Hat's pottery industry was a major force in terms of local economic development and national market significance. Its emergence heralded a new stage in the industrial history of Medicine Hat, and in the heritage of Canadian pottery production.

⁴² *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada*. Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa, 1936).

CHAPTER 3

THE EMERGENCE OF THE POTTERY INDUSTRY

In 1912, Medicine Hat's clay products industry took a new turn. Up to that point, the industry had been based on the production of bricks and sewer pipe for commercial construction use. From small, family-run brickyards to large corporations like the Alberta Clay Products Company, the industry used coarse clays and simple firing procedures to produce a rough grade of ceramic ware. The year 1912 saw the emergence of pottery production, where finer clays and glaze compounds were fired in a more complex process to produce wares for domestic use. Crocks, jugs, pitchers, slop pails and other household items formed the basis of this early pottery industry. Stoneware containers were staple commodities in domestic and commercial use at this time, creating an enormous market for pottery manufacturers. And Medicine Hat's natural advantages loaned themselves as readily to the manufacture of pottery as they did to other ceramic products.

The pottery industry in Medicine Hat did not develop out of a handcraft tradition, as it had in central and eastern Canada. It was a product of the industrial boom, where raw materials were readily available and interested investors with cash in hand were looking for opportunities. There were few experienced potters in Medicine Hat. A handful of names emerges from the hundreds who worked in the pottery industry, of men who apprenticed as potters in England or the United States. They worked as plant managers, or founded their own potteries. Most of the labourers in the pottery plants were unskilled workers trained on the job.

Three enterprises are associated with the emergence of the pottery industry in Medicine Hat: the Medicine Hat Pottery Company, Medalta Stoneware Limited, and the Gas City Pottery. All were founded between 1912 and 1916. Medalta, largest of the three, was the only one to survive the difficult first years of operation and develop into a successful business.

THE MEDICINE HAT POTTERY COMPANY

The first pottery factory in Medicine Hat was founded in 1912 by John McIntyre, representative of the Western Porcelain Manufacturing Company in Spokane, Washington. He saw the successful production of brick and sewer pipe in Medicine Hat, and reasoned that pottery production could benefit from the same advantages enjoyed by these other clay products manufacturers: natural gas would reduce the cost of firing the kilns, and finished products could be shipped to market on the CPR. There was one major difference: the coarse earthenware and stoneware clays used to produce bricks and pipes were available locally, while the finer grades of clay required for producing pottery had to be imported. This posed no great problem for McIntyre, as he could access Western Porcelain's clay deposits in Washington which he proposed to import at the rate of one carload every

second day.¹ Because natural gas allowed him to fire the pottery cheaply, he could afford to transport the raw material to Medicine Hat.

City Council evidently agreed with McIntyre's assessment, as they granted him concessions in March of 1912 amounting to free land, reduced utilities, and tax exemptions. In return, McIntyre was to erect a plant for not less than \$37,000 and offer continuous employment to between 50 and 65 employees.² The factory was supposed to open in May of 1912, but McIntyre was held up for months on the delivery of the machinery he ordered from East Liverpool, Ohio. His superintendent, William Clark, kept the staff busy making moulds, so that when the equipment finally arrived in January 1913 the plant was ready to go into production.³ By March 1913 the Medicine Hat Pottery Company was proudly displaying its wares in local store windows and at the Board of Trade.⁴

Unfortunately, not much else is known about the company. New enterprises starting in Medicine Hat were greeted with great fanfare, but those that went under disappeared quietly. The pottery went out of business after little more than one year in operation. Apparently, the cost of bringing in clay from Washington State was prohibitive. Very few of the company's wares have survived, although the *Medicine Hat Manufacturer* listed the products of the Medicine Hat Pottery in 1913 as including flower pots, jugs, and demi-johns.⁵ The company survives as a footnote in Medicine Hat's industrial history, and were it not for the fact that Medalta Stoneware Limited rose from its ashes, it might have faded into complete obscurity.

MEDALTA STONEWARE LIMITED ♦

When the Medicine Hat Pottery went under in 1914, it attracted the attention of another group of investors: Charles Pratt, Ulysses Sherman Grant, and William Creer.⁶ They acquired the defunct pottery in the name of the Medalta Stoneware Company in December of 1915. As its name suggests, it was designed to manufacture wares from stoneware clays, primarily household items such as crocks, jugs and churns. By the spring of 1916 Medalta was in full production with seventeen staff on the payroll.⁷ William Clark, former superintendent of the Medicine Hat Pottery Company, oversaw the factory's operations. Carloads

¹ *Medicine Hat News*, May 23, 1912.

² City of Medicine Hat By-Law No. 279, March 11, 1912.

³ *The Medicine Hat Manufacturer*, Vol. 1, No. 2, January 1913 (Medicine Hat Museum & Art Gallery Archives M.76.4.7).

⁴ *The Medicine Hat Manufacturer*, Vol. 1, No. 4, March 1913 (Medicine Hat Museum & Art Gallery Archives M.76.4.7).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Medalta Stoneware Ltd. Subscription List, January 4, 1916 (PAA 69.235/1).

⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, July 10, 1916.

of stoneware were already being shipped to Regina and Vancouver, prompting the *Medicine Hat News* to proclaim that Medalta's wares were "undoubtedly one of the best advertisers for Medicine Hat as the product goes all over the country."⁸

Why did Medalta locate in Medicine Hat, literally on the heels of McIntyre's failed enterprise? A number of factors went into the decision. Pratt, Grant and Creer were all from the Medicine Hat area, unlike other investors in the clay products industry who had come from Washington or Ohio. Medalta's owners were pursuing a business opportunity in their own community. Civic pride is evident in the name they chose for the company, a contraction of Medicine Hat, Alberta. Medalta was also taking advantage of an established capital enterprise: McIntyre had already negotiated the trouble and expense of building and equipping the pottery. The factory and its machinery were ready to go into production. Furthermore, McIntyre had been crippled by the expense of importing pottery clay from Washington. Pratt, Grant and Creer were able to take advantage of a much closer source for their raw material: only 480 kilometers from Medicine Hat was the small community of Eastend, Saskatchewan which had large deposits of clay suitable for pottery production. Although Medalta had no clay lands or leases initially, Pratt and Grant both purchased significant tracts of land in Eastend, and were able to provide Medalta with a cheap and steady supply of clay.⁹ In fact, it is possible that Medalta would have located in Eastend



Medalta's large "Beehive" kilns were fired for production during the spring of 1916. (Medalta Potteries Catalogue, 1924: M5827, Glenbow Archives.)

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Shareholders' Meeting August 17, 1920 (PAA 69.235/1).

to be close to its clay sources, had it not been for the overriding advantage of Medicine Hat's natural gas. The main cost in clay manufacturing was the fuel, and it was much cheaper to take the clay to the fuel than the fuel to the clay. Without spelling out the mathematics in detail, Pratt claimed in 1922 that natural gas represented "a saving of \$19,000.00 a year as compared with coal at \$5.00 per ton."¹⁰

What do we know of the entrepreneurs who established Medalta? Charles Pratt emerges most clearly from the past through company correspondence, photographs and personal letters. Born in Scotland in 1875, he emigrated with his family to Heathcote, Ontario at the age of eleven. His business career began in 1900 when he opened a general store there with his older brother Albert. Eight years later he decided to go west, and got off the train in Medicine Hat. He had no experience in the lumber trade, but established the Gas City Lumber Co., which he operated for five years. In the real estate boom before World War I he risked all his money on the volatile land market – and promptly lost it. By 1915 he rallied and, along with two partners, tried his hand at farming. With the profits from a bumper crop of wheat and oats, he bought into Medalta Stoneware. At the time, Medalta was little more than "a defunct, dirty, prosaic, uninteresting factory" which had gone into receivership after barely a year in operation, and Pratt knew no more about ceramics than he had about lumber, real estate, or farming.¹¹ Yet he was clearly a man ready to take a gamble, and he saw enough promise in Medalta's potential production to warrant the investment of his time and resources.

Ulysses Grant is described in the company records as a "gentleman."¹² Originally from North Dakota, his involvement in Medalta appears to have been primarily financial.¹³ He spearheaded an attempt to re-capitalize the plant in the early 1920s so that it could expand its production, but apart from this admittedly ambitious project, his name does not figure prominently.

William A. Creer appears to have been the only one of the three with any experience in the pottery industry. Listed as a "burner" in the company records, he supervised the kilns at Medalta.¹⁴ The kilns were fired for three days at a time, and then took three days

¹⁰Instructions to Agents Selling Stock in the Medalta Potteries Ltd., n. d., ca.1922. (PAA 69.235/215). It is interesting to note that *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* offered the same advice in an article on Canadian White Tableware: "The experience of pottery manufacturers has been that, while it is desirable to have the plant in the vicinity of the largest market, the main feature so far as plant operation is concerned is to be located so as to ensure the flow of raw materials into the plant at the lowest possible cost." (Vol. IV, No. 2 (February 1931) p.8.

¹¹H.A. McLeod, "A Success in Clay," *MacLean's Magazine* (August 15, 1928) p.9.

¹²Summary of Capital and Shares of Medalta Potteries Limited up to December 31, 1925." (PAA 69.235/69).

¹³G.B. Armstrong to M. Antonelli, September 23, 1975 (CPIC Archives).

¹⁴Summary of Capital and Shares of Medalta Potteries Limited up to December 31, 1925." (PAA 69.235/69).

to cool down sufficiently for the wares to be unloaded. Creer oversaw the firing process, and trained the staff who worked the kilns.¹⁵

With Pratt as President and General Manager, Medalta quickly became successful. Although Pratt himself was not knowledgeable about pottery manufacturing, he was able to purchase glaze formulas and other information from the Medicine Hat Pottery Company's effects.¹⁶ He hired two sales agents to market the company's wares in Manitoba and Saskatchewan for a 15% commission, and personally undertook "to investigate the possibilities of the market for disposing of [Medalta's] output".¹⁷ Pratt made himself familiar with the factory and its equipment and systematically set about making improvements to the plant. He installed lighting systems, steam pipes, ventilators, a new packing room and mould room in the first two years of operation, ensuring that all work was "done at the lowest possible expence [sic] for the value received."¹⁸ As a measure of the company's rising fortunes, his own monthly salary rose from \$75 in 1916 to \$250 in 1918; Grant and Creer as Vice President and Superintendent respectively received \$160 a month.¹⁹

GAS CITY POTTERY LIMITED

Pratt, Grant and Creer were not the only entrepreneurs to see the potential of Medicine Hat's pottery industry. One other company emerged in the industry's beginning years. William Clark, a native of Ohio with a "life experience" in pottery manufacture, incorporated the Gas City Pottery in December, 1916 – exactly one year after Medalta.²⁰ Clark had originally come to Medicine Hat to take the position of superintendent at the Medicine Hat Pottery Company. When Medalta Stoneware bought up the plant at the end of 1915, Clark was taken on as a "great asset" to the company's production, again as superintendent.²¹ However, he must have already been planning his own venture when he started at Medalta, as his initial agreement with the city was to have come into force on May 1, 1916. But he ran into difficulties in financing the undertaking which delayed him until the end of the year.²²

Clark erected a small building just across the road from Medalta for \$4,900 and a kiln for \$2,500. There, with a staff of ten, he began producing stoneware crocks, and

¹⁵Isabelle Bruce, Creer's daughter, to Jack Forbes, February 5, 1976 (CPIC Archives).

¹⁶Directors' Meeting, April 16, 1916 (PAA 69.235/1).

¹⁷Directors' Meetings, January 18, 1916; April 18, 1916; and December 18, 1917 (PAA 69.235/1).

¹⁸January 13, 1918 Annual Meeting of Stockholders (PAA 69.235/1).

¹⁹Directors' Meeting April 28, 1916 (PAA 69.235/1); Annual Meeting of Stockholders, January 13, 1918 (PAA 69.235/1).

²⁰*Medicine Hat News*, July 10, 1916.

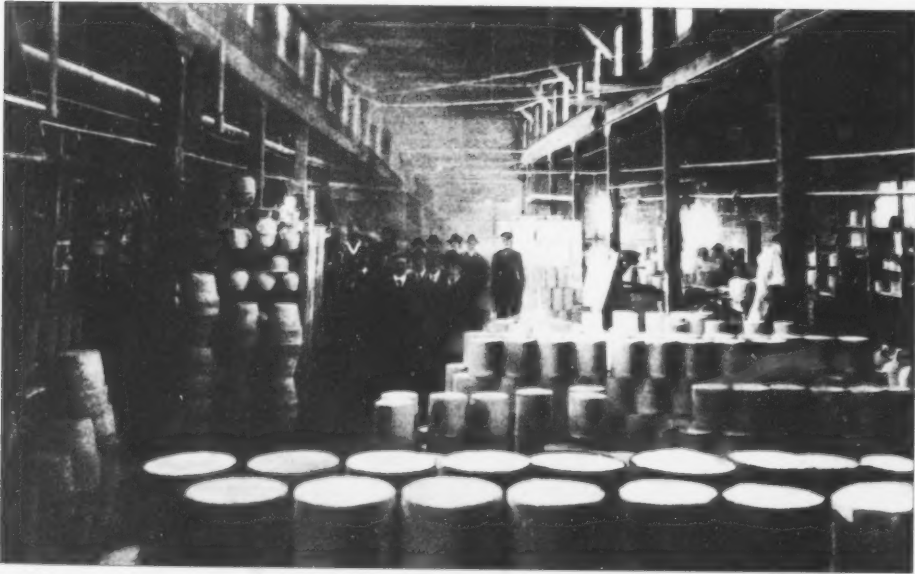
²¹*Ibid.*

²²Council Minutes, December 4, 1916.

subsequently expanded his lines to include a range of kitchen wares such as mixing bowls, teapots and slop jars.²³ In January of 1922, Clark changed the company's name to Canada Pottery, undoubtedly in an effort to capitalize on the "Made in Canada" movement initiated by manufacturers in central and eastern Canada. However, the pottery's fortunes did not improve, and two years later Clark returned to Ohio leaving his son John to close down the plant.²⁴

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDALTA POTTERIES

The progress of Medalta Stoneware continued without regard to the fortunes of its would-be competitor. During the years when Clark was struggling to get established, Medalta began to define its territory. Initially, Medalta Stoneware manufactured a fairly limited number of basic household items, including crocks, jugs, churns, and water coolers. Several smaller pieces such as mixing bowls, pitchers, teapots, bean pots and flower pots were also produced in the early years. By 1922, the range of wares had expanded to include more specialized items like pickle jars, cuspidors, jam jars, meat roasters and



The Prince of Wales toured the Medalta plant in 1919 during a visit to Medicine Hat. This photograph was used in the company's 1924 catalogue. (Medalta Potteries Catalogue, 1924: M5827, Glenbow Archives.)

²³Wrigley's *Alberta Directory*, 1916.

²⁴Annual Statement, December 31, 1924 (Alberta Registries, File 4450).

foot warmers, as well as a limited number of industrial items such as chemical tanks and battery jars. While Medalta's stoneware products were popular with its customers, the market for ceramic wares was considerably broader and the company's success in one area suggested that greater things could be accomplished. By 1918, Pratt, Grant and Creer began to envisage the development of a much larger enterprise.

Canada's extensive market for ceramic wares was satisfied almost entirely by imports. The nation-wide demand for dishes used in households and restaurants was filled by the pottery industries of Britain, Europe and Japan. Whitewares, which included dishes and other finer ceramic products, were regularly imported because no Canadian manufacturer produced them. Whiteware production required a fine-grained clay which fired to a white or cream colour. As well, different kiln temperatures, firing times and equipment were required to shape and fire this finer clay. When suitable clays were discovered in Eastend, Saskatchewan, Charles Pratt saw an opportunity for Medalta to expand and capitalize on this market. As he explained, the success of the company's stoneware production could be duplicated "many times over" in whiteware, as the potential market was so much greater:

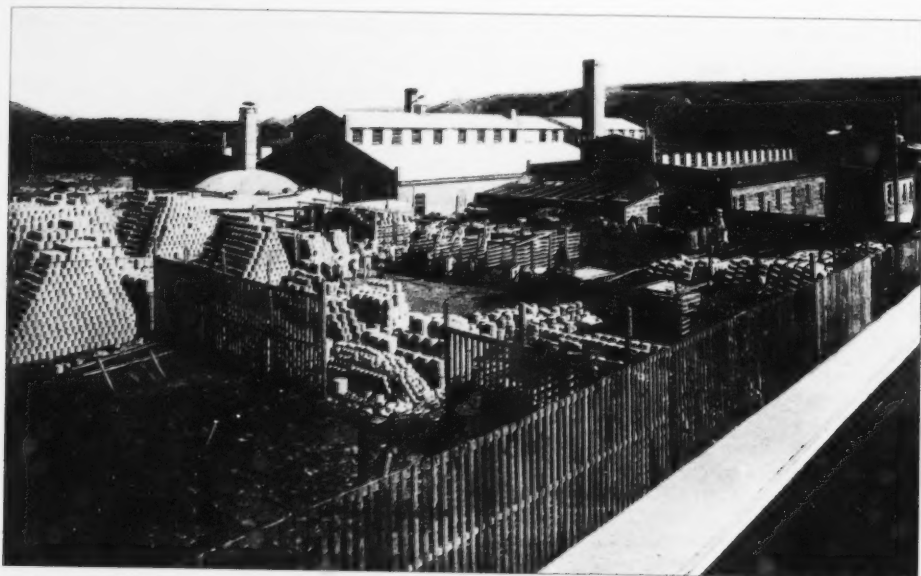
When one considers that every family is using white cups, saucers and plates, etc. on their tables three times a day and each article [is] imported into this country, it will readily be realized that the volume of business is tremendous, as not a single article of this kind is now made in Canada. Between five and six million dollars worth of white ware is imported into Canada every year.²⁵

In order to begin whiteware production, the company needed to build additions to the plant, install equipment suited to production of the new lines, and acquire additional clay leases.²⁶ This required capital, which Medalta did not have. Ulysses Grant and Charles Pratt embarked on two efforts to raise the capital they needed through outside financing. Grant and Pratt prepared numerous documents on Medalta's history and commercial viability for circulation to individuals and corporations as potential investors. These emphasized both the quality of the whiteware clay and the availability of cheap natural gas, which together would ensure further financial success for the company. They also stressed the significance and size of the market, and the marketability of the products that the company proposed to make. The company prospectus states: "it must be remembered that the Canadian market is an ever-growing one as this is a young and growing country and the products of this company are not luxuries but in every instance household or commercial necessities."²⁷ The prospectus emphasized the viability of

²⁵"History and Progress of the Medalta Stoneware Limited, Medicine Hat, Alberta." Unpublished manuscript, attributed to Charles Pratt by the author. Undated, ca. 1923 (PAA 69.235/6).

²⁶Prospectus of Medalta Potteries Ltd., Objects of the Company, n. d., ca. 1922. (PAA 69.235/11).

²⁷Prospectus of Medalta Potteries Ltd., Objects of the Company, n. d., ca. 1922. (PAA 69.235/11).



This view of Medalta's storage yard shows part of their huge inventory of stoneware crocks. (Medalta Potteries Catalogue, 1924.)

expanded production and listed the wares Medalta could profitably make: "white ware, table ware, dinner ware, hotel ware, stoneware, insulators, pottery, queens ware, earthenware and other ceramic products."²⁸

FINANCING A NEW VENTURE

Ulysses Grant undertook the first effort to raise funds for Medalta's capital expansion. In September 1922, he was given a six-month option to purchase Medalta Stoneware in its entirety for \$125,000. Grant's plan was to form a new company, to be called Medalta Potteries, which would manufacture whiteware and insulators in conjunction with stoneware.²⁹ But first he needed money to purchase the assets of Medalta Stoneware, and to re-tool the factory for more diversified production. Partly, these funds were to come from sales of Medalta's existing product line. Grant was authorized to sell Medalta Stoneware products directly in Alberta and Saskatchewan as part of his six-month option.³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.* The list of wares was clearly intended to impress prospective investors, as several of the terms are synonymous.

²⁹ Special Meeting of Shareholders, September 14, 1922. (PAA 69.235/1).

³⁰ A company Price List gives the wholesale carload prices "for Alberta and Saskatchewan, as specified in option given to Mr. U.S. Grant under date of September 14th, 1922."

But the bulk of the funds were to come from an ambitious plan to sell shares in the new company throughout Western Canada.³¹ In Saskatchewan alone, he proposed to offer one thousand shares at \$100 each, pending approval by the Saskatchewan Board of Control.³²

Grant arranged for Medalta's sales agents and distributors to engage in selling the shares. An undercurrent of humour in their progress reports conveys an impression that they sensed the company was overreaching itself in trying to interest outside investors. C.W. Smith, Medalta's agent in Moose Jaw, promised to approach all the wealthy people he knew, including "different Dentist[s], Doctors, Druggists, and... bootleggers too" to buy shares in Medalta.³³ And distributor W.C. Wood of the Great Western Furniture Store in Saskatchewan, wrote to say that he "shot the Bull" at some prospective investors.³⁴ In part, this attitude reflects the poor quality of the samples Grant initially provided, which were not enough to inspire confidence in the new company's potential. As Wood pointed out:

Now it is very important that we have some first class samples to show the public, and the breaking in the kilns must be remedied at once, the Perfect sample is what we want, the Writer is quite dissappointed [sic] with the samples.³⁵

Apparently, better samples were soon in Wood's hands, for by the end of October he wrote that prospective investors "were quite dumfounded over the ware and was highly elated with the ware, they were just as nice as they could be."³⁶ However, by mid-November they backed out saying that the asking price was too high.³⁷ The plan was further compromised when the company ran into political roadblocks and could not get provincial approval to sell shares in Saskatchewan.³⁸ The final blow was struck when it became apparent that considerable financial investment was required to begin selling shares; as a result, the company withdrew its stock from the market before any moneys were ever received.³⁹

Grant's six-month window of opportunity expired in March, 1923 but it must have become clear before then that his plan was not going to work. Late in 1922, Pratt began to pursue other possibilities for financing. He targetted British investors through

³¹U.S. Grant to A.W. Smith, Secretary, Manitoba Public Utilities Commission, December 8, 1922. (PAA 69.235/13).

³²Correspondence, December 8, 1922 (PAA 69.235/17).

³³C.W. Smith to Medalta Potteries Ltd., December 8, 1922 (PAA 69.235/17).

³⁴W.C. Wood to U.S. Grant, October 30, 1922. (PAA 69.235/15).

³⁵W.C. Wood to U.S. Grant, October 13, 1922. (PAA 69.235/15).

³⁶W.C. Wood to U.S. Grant, October 30, 1922. (PAA 69.235/15).

³⁷W.C. Wood to U.S. Grant, November 14, 1922. (PAA 69.235/15).

³⁸PAA 69.235/7 and /17.

³⁹C. Pratt to Public Utilities Commission, Winnipeg, Manitoba, January 11, 1924 (PAA 69.235/12).

the Canadian British Corporation, an English association organized solely for promoting industrial expansion in Canada. It supported different kinds of projects, including that of "extending existing Canadian industries with British capital."⁴⁰

Pratt sent clay samples and company brochures to Major A.D. Watts, manager of the Canadian British Corporation, in an effort to interest him in finding investors to subsidize Medalta's expansion. Pratt explained that while plans were to remain conservative initially, he hoped to enlarge the plant and the range of wares it produced, adding several lines of stoneware and developing new whiteware lines. Future plans included the manufacture of insulators, sanitary ware, and floor tile.⁴¹ Pratt requested \$200,000 from the Corporation, stating it would require \$125,000 to build and equip a modern plant, with \$75,000 for working expenses, carrying stock and accounts; "in fact," he concluded, "we do not think it could be done for less."⁴²

Watts was very interested in the proposal, although he wanted assurance on the extent and quality of the clay deposits which the company planned to use in manufacturing whiteware. Watts strongly advised Pratt to send samples to Professor W.G. Worcester, who had made exhaustive studies of clay deposits in Saskatchewan: "Being the Professor of Ceramics in the University of Saskatchewan," Watts pointed out, "his report would carry great weight if he found the clay suitable."⁴³

By mid-February, Watts was able to report good progress on the proposal. As he explained to Pratt, his success was due in large part to the fact that the Corporation's Chairman "is Auditor to the Potters' Association so that he knows each of the big manufacturers personally." As a result, Watts was meeting with "probably the biggest manufacturer of whiteware in Great Britain, who is very interested in the proposition and who is anxious to discuss same."⁴⁴ But by July 1923, serious problems began to undermine the project. Mr. Johnston, principal of the potential investors, withdrew his support. Watts was convinced that "pressure [had] been brought to bear by the pottery trade in general to prevent his going ahead to develop the Canadian potteries which would interfere with British export trade."⁴⁵

Watts travelled to Medicine Hat in September with an alternate funding proposal which he presented to Medalta's stockholders. However, it was felt that the additional

⁴⁰Canadian British Corporation pamphlet (PAA 69.235/1). The other project categories were (a) to establish branches of British industries in Canada; (b) to get British companies to take over or extend Canadian companies; and (c) to use British capital to foster the organization and establishment of new Canadian manufactures or other commercial enterprises.

⁴¹C. Pratt to A.D. Watts, January 25, 1923 (PAA 69.235/11).

⁴²C. Pratt to C.B. Watts, Toronto agent, Canadian British Corporation, February 16, 1923 (PAA 69.235/11).

⁴³C.B. Watts to C. Pratt, February 5, 1923 (PAA 69.235/11).

⁴⁴A.D. Watts to C. Pratt, February 16, 1923 (PAA 69.235/11).

⁴⁵A.D. Watts to C. Pratt, February 16, 1923 (PAA 69.235/11).

capital offered by the Corporation was insufficient for extending Medalta's existing business, let alone for developing new lines of whiteware. Furthermore, the cost of securing the additional capital was considered too high. Pratt notified Watts of the decision, adding that "probably the time is inopportune from a financial standpoint, to make the proposed extensions."⁴⁶ By the end of October, the fundraising proposal came to a halt.

Despite all the effort Pratt went to in trying to establish whiteware manufacture at Medalta, he knew he faced daunting obstacles even had he been able to secure the required funding. He later noted that there were two major problems with trying to manufacture whiteware in Canada.⁴⁷ First, success was contingent upon the Dominion Government increasing the duty on whiteware coming into Canada from 15% to 50%. The success of pottery manufacture in the United States, he said, was directly attributable to the fact that a duty of 50 to 70% was placed on all wares imported from Britain, Austria, and Japan. Secondly, while the ball clay available in Saskatchewan was an important ingredient in manufacturing whiteware, it needed to be mixed with feldspar, flint, and kaolin, all of which had to be imported. He concluded that the expense of production coupled with the stiff competition from imported whiteware made it virtually impossible to make a profit.

By the end of 1923, two separate attempts to obtain additional financing for Medalta's expansion had ended in failure. Pratt, Grant and Creer evidently abandoned their fundraising efforts at this point. However, they continued to pursue the possibility of diversifying the company's wares. In a final bid to redirect Medalta's operations, Pratt called an extraordinary shareholders meeting at the offices of Blackstock & Manzer, the company's lawyers, in June of 1924. With unanimous support, he proposed a motion that the company was to be reconstituted. Medalta Potteries, the new corporation, would assume the assets and liabilities of Medalta Stoneware for \$150,000.⁴⁸ Pratt would continue as President and General Manager, Grant as Vice President and Creer as Secretary.⁴⁹

On August 5, 1924, Medalta Stoneware Ltd. was officially reincorporated as Medalta Potteries Ltd. Starting almost immediately and continuing for the next five years, the company began to diversify its product lines: in addition to the familiar stoneware crocks and jugs, the company began to offer hundreds of new items including seal-top jars, tobacco jars, rabbit feeders, and pigeon nests, as well as teapots, pitchers and bowls in new styles and colours. This wide range of wares was developed without the improvements to the factory that its owners had considered necessary. However, there was one major change in the plant's operations: Jesse William (Bill) Wyatt was hired as plant manager in 1924.

⁴⁶C. Pratt to C.B. Watts, October 19, 1923 (PAA 69.235/11).

⁴⁷C. Pratt to B. Barter, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, June 5, 1926 (PAA 69.235/44).

⁴⁸Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting, June 23, 1924 (PAA 69.235/1).

⁴⁹Shareholders' Meeting, April 9, 1925 (PAA 69.235/2).

The Wyatt family had been potters for four generations, originally in Stoke-on-Trent, the centre of England's pottery industry, and then in Bristol. Wyatt emigrated to Toronto in 1912, bringing with him a book of family formulas for clays, glazes, and manufacturing methods passed down to him by his father.⁵⁰ He worked at various potteries in the Toronto area, where he made flower pots, moulds, dolls' heads, and dinnerware.⁵¹ In 1923, Charles Pratt came to Toronto and offered Wyatt a job at Medalta as plant manager. Wyatt moved to Medicine Hat with his family in 1924, and he and his sons Bill and Bert worked at Medalta until 1930.

Wyatt is a significant figure in Medalta's history. He was the only person working at Medalta who had been inside another pottery.⁵² The company was dependent on his resources and experience in trying to expand its product lines. His position was correspondingly set out in terms broad enough to take advantage of every aspect of his expertise. Wyatt's responsibilities included all aspects of design and production, from making moulds to supervising the plant's operations.⁵³ He changed the measuring unit for crocks and jugs from American wine measure to Imperial gallon, a decision which required him to make thousands of new moulds. He directed the construction of a major addition to the factory when the production areas became too cramped. He installed a rail system and cars, taken from a closed-out mining operation, on Medalta's floor to move wares more efficiently between the production areas and the kilns. He developed new shapes and embossed patterns for Medalta's wares.

Wyatt's arrival generated a storm of activity. By the end of 1925, it was apparent that Medalta needed to expand its premises. The company's business was increasing, and the clay preparation area and work room were now too small. But the following months turned out to be so busy that there was no time for planning and construction. "We have been taxed to our capacity this year in all lines, so much so, that we have been hard put to supply the demand," Pratt reported to his bank manager in November, 1926. A new kiln had been added, and another was needed to prepare for what promised to be an even busier year:

With a steady and increasing demand for our products we are looking forward with optimism to bigger business in 1927, and are equipping and preparing ourselves to handle more business in the future than heretofore.⁵⁴

⁵⁰Interview with B. Wyatt (son of J.W. Wyatt), Fergus Ontario (May 9, 1994).

⁵¹The bisque doll heads which Wyatt made from 1916 to 1918 were used in the Eaton Beauty Dolls, as Eaton's regular supplier was German and consequently was cut off during the war years. Wyatt modelled the heads, his wife Clara made the wigs, and his son Bill glued in the eyes and teeth. (*Ibid.*)

⁵²H.A. MacLeod, *op. cit.*, p.48. William Clark, hired as plant superintendent in 1916, was an experienced potter from Ohio, but he left Medalta the same year he started there.

⁵³Interview with B. Wyatt, Fergus Ontario (May 9, 1994).

⁵⁴C. Pratt to C.D. Saunders, Manager, Royal Bank, Medicine Hat, November 24, 1926 (PAA 69.235/40).

However, by early 1927, the situation on the factory floor was becoming untenable. "We are so jammed up in our present work room," Pratt complained, "that the men [are] falling over each other and the goods [are] being broken."⁵⁵ Moreover, newly acquired equipment was left unused because there was no space for it. Pratt had purchased a large drum for manufacturing 40- and 50-gallon crocks, but the ceiling was not high enough to accommodate the machine. Manufacture of these wares was therefore delayed until the new building, with its higher ceilings, was completed.⁵⁶ The company was finally left with no alternative but to confront its immediate problem of insufficient and overcrowded work space.

Preparation for the needed addition finally began in February of 1927. Rather than adding new construction onto the plant, Pratt decided to get an existing building, dismantle it, and re-build it behind the existing factory. He chose a steel structure erected in 1913 by the Saskatchewan Bridge and Iron Company, measuring 200 feet long and 110 feet wide with 104 windows. Kinnaird Cartage Company was hired in April to take the entire building apart, number each piece, and transport the components to Medalta's premises, all for the sum of \$1,325.⁵⁷ No sooner had the deal with Kinnaird been finalized when Medalta ran into another problem. In order to build, the company needed to acquire additional land.

Arrangements were made to purchase an adjoining piece of land from the Dominion Glass Company, but Pratt also needed to build over a street which ran between the two properties. Given that Medalta's expansion "would be of considerable benefit to the city as well as the Company," City Council agreed in May to close off the street.⁵⁸ At that point, the company was ready to go ahead. For the next six months, Medalta kept a local heavy transport company in business with steady requirements for hauling lumber, iron, brick, plaster, tile, and machinery.⁵⁹ Finally, in November Pratt was able to state that they hoped to get into the new building by the first of January when, he said, "we hope to have a plant which will be second to none in economy and operation."⁶⁰

WORKERS AND WORKING CONDITIONS ♦

Medalta, in the decade following its opening, saw its product lines diversify, its clientele multiply, and the number of people employed in the factory increase more than eight-fold.

⁵⁵C. Pratt to A.W. Pratt, Toronto, May 2, 1927 (PAA 69.235/201).

⁵⁶C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto June 14, 1927 (PAA 69.235/201).

⁵⁷Kinnaird Cartage Co. to Medalta Potteries Ltd., April 7, 1927 (PAA 69.235/196).

⁵⁸Council Minutes, Monday May 2, 1927.

⁵⁹PAA 69.235/191a. One of the bills submitted by G.N. Gallup, Heavy Teaming and Excavating, was paid in cash and kind for "\$58.57 less combinette \$1.00."

⁶⁰C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto, November 15, 1927 (PAA 69.235/202).

From its initial twelve employees in 1916, Medalta grew to a staff of 100 by 1926, with 78 men and 22 women.⁶¹

Was the company's prosperity evident in working conditions in the factory? A government inspector from the Provincial Department of Labour reported in 1926 that the rooms were properly ventilated, but the toilet facilities were inadequate and the general sanitary conditions rated only as "fair."⁶² Yet Medalta must have been considered a reasonable place to work. When the company placed an advertisement for a stenographer in the *Medicine Hat News* in 1926 it drew ten responses, all from women, expecting remuneration in the range of \$40 to \$75 per month.⁶³

It is hard to develop a clear picture of working conditions at this early stage in the company's history. It is evident that Pratt was a careful manager, reluctant to spend money if it could be saved. He often joked about his Scottish roots in justifying both his business sense and his thriftiness. Pay scales at the plant, an obvious indicator of the company's approach to its staff, were kept to the minimum where possible. Pratt was a proponent of the apprenticeship system, in part because of the reduced wages paid to apprentices. He argued against an increase by explaining that even at the lower rates "a boy will often destroy more ware and actually cost us more than he earns."⁶⁴ At one point, the Department of Labour complained that more than the stipulated minimum 25% of Medalta's female employees were paid as apprentices. In his defense, Pratt pointed out the difficulties of obtaining trained help in the pottery industry, making it clear that "it is not our intention to pay experienced wages to inexperienced girls." In a more threatening tone, he continued:

In the absence of experienced help therefore we have no alternative but to hire the help available and train them and if the Department are determined to prevent our so doing we are equally determined to dismiss the girls and explain to the Public thru [sic] the Press why girls are not permitted to work in Medicine Hat.⁶⁵

Pratt's business correspondence reveals a slightly suspicious attitude towards company employees. While he made it his business to involve himself as much as he could in the plant's operations, it is also apparent that he kept tabs on his staff by getting them to report on one another. Walter Armstrong, sales agent for Saskatchewan, made it part of his route to travel through Eastend and inform Pratt on how the clay excavation was progressing. In fact, Pratt dealt with more than one person in Eastend so that he could play one off

⁶¹H.M. Bishop, Inspector, Bureau of Labour, Inspector's Report, June 16, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

⁶²H.M. Bishop, Inspector, Bureau of Labour, Inspector's Report, June 16, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

⁶³Job Applications and Letters of Recommendation, 1927 (PAA 69.235/216).

⁶⁴C. Pratt to C. Pingle, MLA for Medicine Hat, March 8, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

⁶⁵C. Pratt to W. Smeaton, Commissioner of Labour, Edmonton, July 6, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

against the other: Al Vogt, whom Pratt clearly regarded as a loyal and trustworthy employee, received \$1.05 per ton for his clay, while Earl Noble received only \$1.00 per ton for the same grade of clay. Even Wyatt was subjected to a little scrutiny: Pratt asked one of Medalta's distributors to follow up on an order personally by writing to Wyatt, just to be sure to "keep him on his toes."⁶⁶

Pratt's tendency towards suspicion is also evident in his reaction to work-related accidents. He obviously had little patience for workers who claimed they had been injured on the job. James O'Brien ran a piece of wire under his thumb while wheeling a barrow filled with clay, to which Pratt responded, "It is our opinion that he stayed off exactly ten days in order to get full compensation."⁶⁷ Fred Falkenstein fell over while wheeling a barrow filled with sand and hurt his side. He left work feeling sick to the stomach and unable to eat, but Pratt countered, "his step-son and step-daughter are both working in our factory and they tell us he is able to eat anything and do not know of him being sick."⁶⁸ Martin Kohl broke both his wrists on July 15, and had not returned to work by September 10 when Pratt complained to the Workmen's Compensation Board that he should long since have been back at the plant: "We can prove by two of our workmen that this man was digging and hoeing in his own garden without any bandages on his wrists on the 10th August."⁶⁹ This statement was evidently outrageous enough to enervate the Board, as a reply was quickly sent to Pratt stating that a little mild exercise in the garden one month after the accident was considered beneficial, and certainly not grounds for investigation on their part.

Pratt was, first and foremost, a manufacturer and he placed the profit margin of the company ahead of any other interests. Perhaps the clearest example of this is found in his reaction to the Factories Act proposed by the Provincial Government in 1926. Amongst other provisions, the Act proposed a reduction in hours of work for industrial employees. The standard work week ran from Monday to Saturday: the new legislation proposed to reduce the number of hours worked during those six days from 60 to 48.⁷⁰ While it was popular with workers, this provision alarmed the manufacturing community, not just in Alberta but throughout Canada. The Canadian Manufacturers' Association declared itself against the Act, and urged its entire membership to support the Prairie Division in opposing it.⁷¹

⁶⁶C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Company, Toronto, October 31, 1927 (PAA 69.235/202).

⁶⁷C. Pratt to Workmen's Compensation Board, March 13, 1926 (PAA 69.235/65).

⁶⁸C. Pratt to Workmen's Compensation Board, July 28, 1926 (PAA 69.235/65).

⁶⁹C. Pratt to Workmen's Compensation Board, September 10, 1926 (PAA 69.235/65).

⁷⁰This provision was widely interpreted as stipulating an eight-hour day, although the actual wording was for a 48-hour week.

⁷¹T. Ashenhurst, Assistant Secretary, Prairie Division (Edmonton), Canadian Manufacturers' Association to CMA Alberta membership, February 17, 1926 (PAA 69.235/47).

Pratt declared himself "very much exercised" against the Act as he felt it would handicap industry in Alberta.⁷² Amongst other objections, he warned that industries could not afford to pay as much for an eight-hour day.⁷³ He seemed to fear that labourers would still receive the same daily pay even if their hours were reduced, and urged the CMA to pass a resolution that the hourly rate would not increase under an eight-hour day. If workers understood that their pay would be reduced, he was confident that "the best thinking workman would seriously object" to the proposed legislation.⁷⁴

In support of his position, Pratt was evidently anxious to show that Medalta employees were opposed to the new Factory Act. To this end, the signatures of 47 men were obtained on a petition circulated around the plant. Pratt forwarded it to C. S. Pingle, MLA for Medicine Hat, stating somewhat ingenuously:

This list was taken around by one of the men, and none of the men were urged to sign it. Some of the men did not sign it because they did not know enough about it, also we have a number of girls and boys working whose signatures were not solicited.⁷⁵

The following day he sent another petition to Pingle, this one signed by an additional 12 men who had been "somewhat undecided yesterday but came to us this morning and wished to sign."⁷⁶

Pratt never considered the matter from an employee's perspective. He saw the disruption of the kiln schedule, a reduced capacity for production, and an increase in costs. He could readily recite the hardships he faced as an industrialist: capital expenses, labour costs, production limitations, and foreign competition from England, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Japan.⁷⁷ From his perspective, shortening the work week only compounded the problems he already faced. The possibility that it might improve the standard of living for his employees was never mentioned. For him, it was purely a matter of losing a competitive edge.

Fortunately for Pratt, the concerted efforts of Alberta manufacturers were successful in amending the proposed Factories Act: the working week was only reduced to 56 hours, and an inspector was empowered to make exceptions on an individual basis. Furthermore,

⁷²C. Pratt to T. Ashenhurst, Edmonton, February 19, 1926 (PAA 69.235/47).

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴C. Pratt to T. Ashenhurst, Assistant Secretary, Prairie Division, Canadian Manufacturers' Association, September 24, 1926 (PAA 69.235/47).

⁷⁵C. Pratt to C.S. Pingle, Legislature Building, Edmonton, March 10, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

⁷⁶C. Pratt to C.S. Pingle, Legislature Building, Edmonton, March 11, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

⁷⁷C. Pratt to Chairman and Members of the Forty-eight-hour-week, Commission of Enquiry, Medicine Hat, December 6, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

the Act's implementation was delayed while a province-wide Commission chaired by Judge A. A. Carpenter investigated the feasibility of a 48-hour week.⁷⁸ It was not until March 1945 that legislation was finally enacted which limited the working week for all industrial employees to 48 hours.⁷⁹

Pratt was able to continue Medalta's operations on the basis of a nine-hour day without compromising the plant's productivity. By the mid-1920s, Medalta had established itself as the sole manufacturer of pottery in Medicine Hat. With no local competition, an established market and an expanding line of products, the company was poised for prosperity.

⁷⁸T. Ashenhurst, Confidential memo to CMA membership, April 14, 1926 (PAA 69.235/47). Further to his own individual efforts, it is interesting to note that Pratt assisted the CMA in coordinating Alberta manufacturers who opposed the Factories Act. He gained sufficient prominence in vocalizing his opposition to the Act that he was elected to the Executive Council of the CMA in 1926. (J.T. Stirrett, General Secretary, Canadian Manufacturers' Association, Toronto to C. Pratt, June 11, 1926 (PAA 69.235/47).)

⁷⁹The Hours of Work Act, *Statutes of Alberta* 1945, 1st Session, Chapter 62. Hours of work for women in industry had already been limited to 48 per week in 1936 (Amendment to the Hours of Work Act, *Statute of Alberta* 1936, 2nd Session, Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING A PROSPEROUS BUSINESS



Medalta changed dramatically within its first decade of operations. Between 1916 and 1926 the factory expanded, its product lines diversified, and the company's clientele multiplied. With Charles Pratt at the helm and Bill Wyatt on the factory floor, Medalta's success climbed through the 1920s. Although separate figures for Alberta are not available until 1935, statistics show that the value of pottery production in Canada rose steadily from 1923 to 1928, peaking in 1929 at levels which would not be seen again until 1945.¹ Medalta's sales figures reflect the company's steady development and its ability to participate in the general success of the industry (Figure 5).²

Medalta operated continuously during these years, and succeeded in opening up numerous new accounts.³ Sales figures increased fairly steadily, although capital developments and expenditures ate into the company's profit margin: in 1923, Medalta's earnings totalled

Figure 5
Gross Sales, Medalta (available years from 1917-1926)



¹ *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada*, Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa, 1933 to 1960).

² Sales figures taken from annual reports, income tax forms, and financial summaries from 1918 to 1927 (PAA 69.235/1, /3, and /69).

³ Annual Meeting of Stockholders, January 13, 1918 and February 20, 1919 (PAA 69.235/1).

just over 1% on its investment, and 1924 saw a loss of \$800. By 1925, the company registered a profit of 5%.⁴

Despite the ups and downs noted by the company's accountant, Medalta was clearly a profitable company. What made Medalta successful, when both its rivals had been unable to stay in business? There are three principal factors which contributed to the company's prosperity. First, Medalta was able to negotiate favourable supplies of the raw materials it required. Secondly, the company was able to establish a broadly based market within a few short years, due in part to Pratt's Ontario connections. The clients which the company targetted were large-scale retailers, some with outlets across Canada or mail-order supply houses. These provided a steady source of demand in what was otherwise a primarily seasonal market for stoneware containers. They also paid their bills promptly.⁵ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Medalta developed new wares in response to changes in consumer needs and preferences.

It is important to realize that these three factors were not simple recipes for success. Nor do they represent clear and decisive actions on the part of Medalta's management. The cumulative experience of the company can be distilled into three areas where, while



Medalta's sales grew steadily through the 1920s, thanks to marketing strategies like this trade fair display. (Medalta Stoneware Ltd.: P328.270, MHM&AG.)

⁴C. Pratt to C. Pingle, MLA for Medicine Hat, March 8, 1926 (PAA 69.235/69).

⁵C. Pratt to Mr. C.D. Saunders, Manager, Royal Bank, Medicine Hat, November 24, 1926 (PAA 69.235/40).

both success and failure were experienced, there was an overall trend toward an improvement in the company's position. By analyzing the many small actions, decisions, mistakes, and fortuitous circumstances in each area, we can gain a greater understanding of Medalta's prosperity in this period.

RAW MATERIALS

Industrial enterprises are dependent on the raw materials which they transform into finished products. The essential raw materials for pottery production are fuel and clay. While clay is the actual substance from which pottery is made, fuel constituted the principal expense of manufacture. Both materials were readily available in Medicine Hat, but the question of making a profitable arrangement for supply would clearly have a major impact on the company's finances.

When Medalta began manufacturing in 1916, it was operating at a disadvantage: the company had no gas agreement with the City of Medicine Hat.⁶ Although Medalta was able to purchase gas at the manufacturers' rate, some factories had been able to negotiate even more favourable terms. In December 1921, Pratt met with City Council to try and do the same.⁷ He proposed that Medalta would drill a gas well on its property at company expense. 75% of the gas would be delivered to Medalta at a flat rate of \$100 per month, and the remaining 25% would be given to the City free of cost. Any additional gas required by the company would be purchased at the prevailing manufacturers' rate. Council supported the proposal.

The matter did not come up again until 1928, when it became apparent that Medalta had benefitted from reduced gas rates, but had not yet installed the well.⁸ Pratt explained that the expenses of enlarging the plant and installing new equipment had precluded the possibility of drilling the well, and requested an extension on the existing agreement until 1930. Arguing that his plant presently employed one hundred men, and the improvements he was currently completing would permit an additional 25 hands, he felt his proposition was favourable both to the company and the City. But almost half of the Council members disagreed. Medalta paid \$2,651 for gas in 1927, and if the straight manufacturers' rate had been paid that amount would have more than doubled to almost \$6,000. However, Pratt managed to extract an extension and Medalta continued to pay the reduced rate. Eventually the company drilled not one, but two wells on its premises, although in the end they purchased gas directly from the city.⁹

⁶"The Medalta Stoneware Limited," undated typescript, ca. 1922 (PAA 69.235/6)

⁷Council Minutes, December 19, 1921.

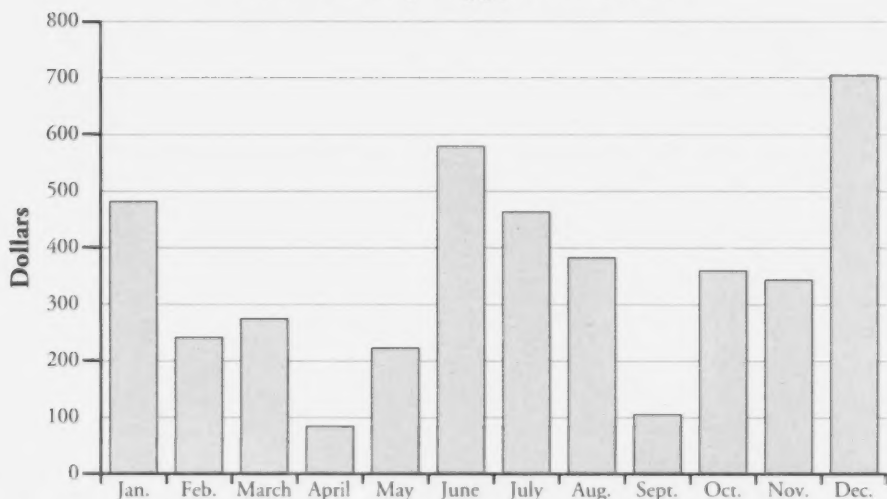
⁸Council Minutes, December 17, 1928.

⁹Yackulic, "Western Industrial Communities – Medicine Hat, Alberta." *Western Business and Industry* Vol. 19, No. 47 (July 1945) p.36.

Clay presented its own problems of supply. Local clays were not fine enough for manufacturing pottery wares, and suitable clay had to be shipped in from Eastend, Saskatchewan. When Medalta started operating in 1916, it had no clay on hand, no clay deposits and no clay leases.¹⁰ The company had to pay for clay to be excavated in Eastend, and also for repairs to the road which led from the clay pits to the loading platform on the CPR line. In addition, the company paid the CPR by the ton for transporting the clay to the factory.

Over the next four years, Pratt worked to bring some of the costs for clay more directly under the company's control. By 1920 Pratt and Grant had both purchased clay deposits in Eastend, which they exchanged for shares of Medalta's capital stock.¹¹ And by 1926, Charles Pratt had selected three sources of clay in Saskatchewan, and arranged for regular suppliers A. J. Vogt and Earl Noble in Eastend, D. B. Ross in Willows, and H. L. Siemens in Ravenscrag. Medalta required between fifteen and sixteen tons of clay every day.¹² The amounts required rose and fell in response to seasonal fluctuations in the demand for stoneware products. Depending on its type and quality, the price for clay ranged from \$1.00 to \$1.75 per ton. The chart below (Figure 6) outlines Medalta's requirements for clay, showing the amounts paid out each month to its suppliers. Because

Figure 6
Medalta's Clay Supply Costs, 1926



¹⁰"The Medalta Stoneware Limited," undated typescript, ca. 1922 (PAA 69.235/6).

¹¹Shareholders' Meeting August 17, 1920 (PAA 69.235/1). 200 shares of capital stock were allotted to Pratt in exchange for title to his clay beds in Saskatchewan, and 161 shares to US Grant.

¹²C. Pratt to A.J. Vogt, December 17, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

clay was classed as a mineral, there was no charge for the actual clay: the price paid by Medalta was for the labour of removing it from the ground.¹³ Clay was shipped to the factory by rail car at a cost of \$2.60 per ton, almost double the cost of its excavation.¹⁴

Each step in the process of supplying the factory with clay – excavation, loading and transport – presented its own difficulties. The clays at Eastend lay in six-foot thick seams covered by an overburden of soil as much as 26 feet thick. This soil had to be removed so that clay could be taken cleanly from the seam without inadvertently mixing in any contaminants which would cause trouble back at the plant.¹⁵ To ensure that the expense of removing soil was only incurred where clay could profitably be excavated, Pratt decided that test holes should be sent down first using a hand auger. He sent specific instructions to Vogt, telling him to drill down through the overburden and then measure “the exact thickness of seam of each kind of clay and... put in a paper bag samples of every six inches when you are down at the clay, marking what it is.”¹⁶ This would allow Pratt to test the clays in the company’s kilns and make informed choices about excavation and supply.

However, Vogt had great difficulty meeting Pratt’s expectations, as the ground was so rocky he could not get the auger to penetrate through to the clay beds. He had a special extension made for the auger by the local blacksmith, and hired an extra man to help him as the auger itself became “pretty heavy to pull up when we get a few lengths on.”¹⁷ Finally, he tried putting dynamite down the holes to blow the rocks out but even this was unsuccessful. In frustration, he wrote to Pratt:

Just a line to let you know that I tried the auger and I started four holes one 13 ft struck a rock next 9 ft deep and struck another rock one 7 ft other 6 ft struck rock every time so I don’t know what to do auger would work good if it was not for the rock.¹⁸

In the end, Pratt and Vogt decided it would be simplest to hire David Clapper to strip the hill and expose the clay. Using horse-drawn plows and scrapers, he literally lifted the soil off the clay seam. He started on May 7, 1926 and by August 29 had cleared an area 157 feet wide and 80 feet back for \$1,850.¹⁹ Clapper’s method, while labour-intensive and therefore costly, was required by the excessive rockiness of the soil in this location.

¹³ *Regina Leader*, September 3, 1947.

¹⁴ C. Pratt to C.W. Smith, December 14, 1922 (PAA 69.235/17).

¹⁵ E. Noble to Medalta Potteries Ltd., March 10, 1926 (PAA 69.235/99).

¹⁶ C. Pratt to A.J. Vogt, March 26, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

¹⁷ A.J. Vogt to Medalta, April 5, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

¹⁸ April 6, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123). Pratt must have realized that the hand auger was simply not equal to the task, for when he had test holes dug at Willows later in the same year, it was done with a well-drilling machine (C. Pratt to D.B. Ross, Willows, December 30, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123)).

¹⁹ A.J. Vogt to Medalta, April 29, 1926 and August 29, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

Under normal circumstances, dynamite was used to blast out the overburden. Blasting, although more dangerous than stripping, was faster and less expensive. In December of 1926 when the demand for clay was particularly heavy, Vogt hired two extra teams to help with the hauling. However, there was not enough room in the pit for all of them to work efficiently and Vogt hired a man to "blow it up". It took seven days to complete the blasting, and the contractor was paid \$16.00 for his work.²⁰

When Pratt's scheme of drilling test holes to obtain clay samples proved impossible, he decided instead to travel to Eastend with Bill Wyatt to review the clay deposits. When they were on site, Pratt had Wyatt map out any exposed areas and then check the clay's quality to determine what uses it could be put to in the plant. Vogt could then be given explicit instructions on what clay to send to the factory.²¹ For example, part of the clay bed which Clapper stripped was subsequently referred to as "bowl clay".²²

Once the seams were exposed, the clay was loaded into carts. Scrapers pulled by horses or, later on, by tractors proved the most efficient method, although in some



Once the overburden of rock and soil was removed, horse-drawn scrapers were used to take clay from the deposits. (Horse-drawn clay scraper, clay pit, no date: P442.252, MHM&AG.)

²⁰A.J. Vogt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., December 1, 1926 (PAA.69.235/123).

²¹For example, Pratt wrote to Vogt for a shipment of "the light-coloured plastic clay about the centre or near the top of the pit" (November 17, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123)).

²²December 24, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

instances the land formation did not allow this and the clay had to be shovelled out by hand. The process of removing the clay was weather dependent: seasonal rain or snow storms made the road from the clay pit impassable. During one spell of particularly bad winter weather, Medalta nearly ran out of clay. Vogt struggled to maintain the plant's supply, but the snow drifted back to a depth of two feet as quickly as he could clear it. Excavation was held up for over two weeks.²³

Carts laden with clay were drawn by horse to the CPR loading platform where the clay was shoveled into rail cars. The approach ramps to the platforms were difficult for the teams to navigate: at Ravenscrag, the platform was too far from the track, and at Eastend the slope was too steep. After his suppliers made numerous unsuccessful requests to the railway officials for improvements, Pratt wrote to Mr. J. L. Jamieson, CPR Superintendent at Lethbridge, asking him as a personal favour to upgrade the ramp at Eastend, where the bulk of Medalta's clay was shipped from. Jamieson raised and extended the approach with some old bridge timbers, and filled it in with a carload of cinders.²⁴

When the clay finally arrived on the spur line at the Medalta plant, it had to be loaded into wheelbarrows with a pick and shovel. Rail cars held on average 50 tons of clay, and the labourers who unloaded it were paid 15 cents per ton.²⁵ In 1926 alone, Medalta used 4300 tons of clay.²⁶

Clay and gas were not the only raw materials Medalta required. Other minerals and chemicals were needed to improve the quality of the clay and to create glazes. A. J. Vogt, Medalta's principal clay supplier, was also a source for the sand which had to be mixed with the clay to make it less sticky. Vogt sent one car of it to the factory for every four cars of clay.²⁷ The plaster used in making moulds for pottery production was obtained from Hillsboro, New Brunswick at the rate of three or four carloads each year.²⁸ Various minerals were also required for pottery production as fluxing agents to enhance the clay's ability to fuse when fired, and as colouring agents for glazes. Although there were western sources for these, the resource development was not economically justifiable in terms of the local market.²⁹ All minerals therefore had to be shipped in. Transportation charges remained a constant source of irritation for the company, as shipment was considerably more expensive than the raw materials themselves. In a typical instance, Pratt declared

²³ Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat to Calgary head office, February 19, 1938 (PAA 69.235/373).

²⁴ September 23, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

²⁵ Interview with B. Wyatt, (son of J.W. Wyatt and former jiggerman at Medalta) Calgary (June 23, 1994.)

²⁶ C. Pratt to the Department of the Interior, Mining Lands Branch, Ottawa, February 24, 1927 (PAA 69.235/185).

²⁷ C. Pratt to A.J. Vogt, October 9, 1926 (PAA 69.235/123).

²⁸ Accountant, Medalta Potteries Ltd., to Mr. F. Stewart, Chairman Tariff Committee, Canadian Manufacturers' Association, Toronto, September 2, 1926 (PAA 69.235/47).

²⁹ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XIX, No. 1 (January 1946), p.11.

himself "a little sore under the collar" when he had to pay almost \$900 in freight charges on a shipment of feldspar from Kingston, Ontario which had cost him only about \$600 to buy. "This," he exclaimed, "is daylight robbery for a cheap raw material."³⁰

Other materials needed by the company were acquired from pottery supply houses in Britain and the United States. For example, the stilts used to support wares when they were fired in the kilns were imported by the barrel from John Edwards & Sons in Fenton, England.³¹ Items required to complete wares which the company manufactured were also purchased from outside suppliers. Wooden dashers for butter churns were ordered from the Canada Wood Specialty Company in Ontario. Stone filters used in Medalta's water coolers were obtained from the Independent Cravel Company in Joplin, Montana, and fasteners for stoneware pickle jars were imported from Chicago.³²

It quickly becomes clear that Medalta's production was linked to local, national and international markets in terms of its supplies. The critical raw materials of clay and gas were locally available; other natural resources were shipped from elsewhere in Canada, while manufactured supplies were obtained from Ontario, England and the United States. Pratt was able to orchestrate a network of supplies at costs which the company could support – something which its predecessor, the Medicine Hat Pottery Company, had been unable to do.

MARKETING STRATEGIES ♦

Once the raw materials were transformed into pottery, the finished wares had to be sold. Finding clients was an active process, and Medalta's owners made it a priority to ensure that all possible markets were investigated. The company hired its first sales agent before it had even gone into production: W. E. Bonner of Winnipeg was to be paid a 15% commission on all orders he was able to place. By mid-April a second agent was taken on to pursue business with the Saskatchewan government, with a minimum sales expectation of fifty cars within the first year.³³

As President of the company, Pratt also did his share of marketing.³⁴ He arranged to have woodcuts and electroplates of Medalta's wares made "suitable for Magazine and General use."³⁵ He engaged his brother Albert, who had been working as a manufacturers' agent in Toronto, as a distributor; under the name of the Medicine Hat Pottery Company, Albert drummed up business for Medalta in southern Ontario until 1938. Charles Pratt

³⁰C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto, March 29, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

³¹C. Pratt to Davis Turner & Co. Ltd., Manchester, June 23, 1926 (PAA 69.235/54).

³²Invoice, 1927 (PAA 69.235/195); C. Pratt to David J. Dyson Ltd., Winnipeg, August 13, 1926 (PAA 69.235/57).

³³Directors' Meeting, April 18, 1916 (PAA 69.235/1).

³⁴Directors' Meetings, January 18, 1916; April 18, 1916; and December 18, 1917 (PAA 69.235/1).

³⁵C. Pratt to Messrs. Brigdens Ltd., April 15, 1926 (PAA 69.235/44).

also understood the importance of a well-placed gift for securing his clients' loyalty. In an order sent to Walter Woods Ltd., Winnipeg, he enclosed a small crate addressed to the manager, Mr. Pottruff, with a note:

We understand that you have a nice home, and we are including in this crate two lawn Vases and two Jardinieres which you can no doubt make use of and we would ask you to accept with our compliments.³⁶

In a subsequent shipment, Pratt outfitted Mrs. Pottruff's kitchen with stoneware crocks and bowls.³⁷

The company's most significant marketing decision was to act as a wholesale supplier to major retailers. The greatest source of economy, and hence profitability, in the pottery industry was volume production. By filling the kilns to capacity, stoneware could be produced on a scale which kept operating costs to a relative minimum. Pratt cultivated clients for Medalta's wares, not necessarily because the particular sales were lucrative, but because they allowed the plant to produce a greater volume of wares. In 1926, for example, Medalta shipped 199 cars of pottery, 59 of which were sent to distributors in eastern Canada. As Pratt explained in his Annual Report for that year, "We realize that little, if any, money is made on Eastern shipments, but it increases the volume of business and decreases manufacturing costs."³⁸

From an initial clientèle of local hardware stores and general merchants, Pratt moved on to solicit major distributors and national chains in an effort to secure a steady stream of orders. Agents in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Belleville, and Vancouver secured local business for Medalta, while Medalta's own "travellers" covered the prairie region.

Medalta's first big clients were the provincial government liquor commissions in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and later Ontario. Wine was supplied in bulk to the government stores, and had to be re-packaged in jugs for individual sales. Bottles for soft drink companies provided a logical extension of this market. Then followed major retailers like Eaton's, Woolworth's, and the Hudson's Bay Company which sold Medalta's kitchen wares in their stores and mail-order catalogues. Finally, the railway lines with their associated hotels provided a large market for a wide range of products from jardinieres and cuspidors to table service items. But these big clients came at a price: their orders had to be filled with top quality products delivered on schedule. The company struggled with varying degrees of success in meeting these two criteria.

Despite Medalta's unquestionable prosperity in the 1920s, the company's reputation was repeatedly brought into question by the uneven quality of its products and the uncertainty

³⁶C. Pratt to Mr. Poteriff [sic], February 5, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129).

³⁷PAA 69.235/129.

³⁸Annual Report for year ending December 31, 1926 (PAA 69.235/1).

of its shipping schedule. Merchants were regularly obliged to replace defective wares, or to deal with shipments that they could not sell. J. A. Pottruff, manager of Walter Woods Ltd. in Winnipeg, sent a polite enquiry to Medalta stating they were "having trouble with the spouts in Medalta Tea Pots coming off after being in use a day or two... Have you had complaints of this very often?"³⁹ Ben Cunliffe, of Renwick & Cunliffe in Vancouver, complained that a shipment he received contained crocks "so badly out of shape that it is impossible to get a cover on them," and the covers themselves were "warped so that they do not fit within a considerable distance of the top of any crock we put them on to."⁴⁰ James Carter, Medalta's Winnipeg distributor, was incredulous at a shipment of broken bowls he received: "the writer looked at these bowls and found that most of them were even less in places than 1/8 of an inch thick on the sides. Is this not too thin? Are you intending them to be as thin as this?"⁴¹

Manufacturing problems were compounded by shipping difficulties. One of the consequences of Pratt's marketing strategy was that Medalta's inherently breakable pottery had to be shipped by rail car for hundreds and even thousands of kilometers to reach its destination markets. Smaller items were crated and packed with straw, while crocks and other larger items were shipped loose. There was often a considerable amount of breakage in the shipments. Sometimes the crocks were loaded without proper support and rolled during transport; sometimes breakage resulted from rough handling on the part of the carriers.⁴² Medalta's policy was that the company could not guarantee the safe transport of goods as shipping conditions were beyond their control. However, when customers complained, Medalta routinely offered a credit note for half the breakage.⁴³

In addition to the risk of damage during shipping, there were the related expenses. Medalta paid \$10 a ton for straw used in packing and made its own crates from #1 spruce lumber, tailored to each individual order.⁴⁴ Pratt complained that the expense, although necessary, was "a very heavy item" at nearly 20% of the value of the goods themselves.⁴⁵

Pratt's strategy of volume production almost backfired. The evidence of the company's correspondence suggests that Medalta Potteries Ltd. overreached itself in trying to service a national market. Cramped work rooms and limited kiln space coupled with a heavy

³⁹April 9, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129).

⁴⁰Ben Cunliffe to Medalta Potteries, February 1926 (PAA 69.235/113).

⁴¹J.B. Carter to C. Pratt, November 30, 1926 (PAA 69.235/50).

⁴²P. Jomini, Traffic Department, Walter Woods Ltd., Winnipeg to Medalta Potteries Ltd., August 9, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129); C. Pratt to HL Phillips, FW Woolworth Co. Ltd., Calgary, May 31, 1926 (PAA 69.235/131).

⁴³W.G. Armstrong, Manager, Medalta Potteries Ltd., to P. Jomini, Traffic Department, Walter Woods Ltd., Winnipeg, February 16, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129).

⁴⁴C. Pratt to J.A. Pottruff, Walter Woods Ltd., Winnipeg, May 5, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129)

⁴⁵C. Pratt to J.A. Pottruff, Walter Woods Ltd., Winnipeg, May 5, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129).

production schedule left the company struggling to stay on top of its orders – especially when Bill Wyatt was the only experienced potter on staff. An examination of Medalta's relationships with its major clients in this period – the Saskatchewan Liquor Commission, Eaton's, Woolworth's, and the CPR – reveals some of the difficulties behind the company's glowing sales figures.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF MAJOR CLIENTS

Stoneware jugs for the liquor commissions in Alberta and Saskatchewan were a mainstay of Medalta's business in the 1920s. John Anderson, Warehouse Manager for the Saskatchewan Liquor Board, was pleased with his shipments and remarked on the "very good service" he received from Medalta.

In September 1926, Anderson's needs increased: Saskatchewan wanted 5,000 gallons of jugs a week throughout October 1926, and then 1,000 a day in November. Medalta agreed to supply them, and then ran into difficulties meeting the orders. Production was slower than expected, wet weather affected the drying time for the jugs, jug moulds were in short supply, communication between the factory floor and the office was mismanaged – Pratt supplied a steady stream of reasons why the orders were continually short. Medalta was so short on one order that a carload of jugs from Red Wing Union Stoneware in Minnesota had to be brought in, despite the fact that American jugs were more expensive.⁴⁶ Anderson finally pointed out that, while his demands on Medalta's output had been very heavy, he was ordering only half of what Medalta's travelling sales agent had informed him the company would be producing. He had therefore assumed with confidence that Medalta "would be able to take care of [his] order without any trouble."⁴⁷

A separate issue arose when the jugs Medalta managed to ship were found to be defective. Anderson repeatedly complained about the quality of the jugs he received, noting that "there is never a day passes but we receive reports from our stores in connection with the loss sustained by them... due to leaky jars." Anticipating a rebuttal from Medalta, he quickly added:

Incidentally, we might mention that due to the fact that you were unable to keep us supplied with jars, it was necessary for us to purchase several car-loads from the United States, and in checking over the various complaints, we invariably find that the container is a Medalta jar."⁴⁸

⁴⁶W.G. Armstrong, Medalta factory representative, Moose Jaw, to Medalta Potteries Ltd., September 21, 1926 (PAA 69.235/37).

⁴⁷J. Anderson to Medalta Potteries Ltd., October 26, 1926 (PAA 69.235/74).

⁴⁸J. Anderson to Medalta Potteries Ltd., December 10, 1926 (PAA 69.235/74).

In one shipment of 8,000 jugs, Anderson reported 397 broken and 289 "leakers," meaning that almost 9% of the shipment was defective.⁴⁹ Pratt apologized for the difficulties, and told Anderson he had "gone after our superintendent and workmen very hard" to solve the problem of leakage. He also promised that additions to the plant were already under way and a new kiln would be ready to fire by the spring. This, he hoped, would leave Medalta in a better position to handle their requirements.⁵⁰ Pratt must have convinced him that Medalta's troubles were temporary, as Anderson continued to place orders with Medalta in 1927 for a year-end total in excess of 200,000 one-gallon jugs.⁵¹

Medalta faced a different set of advantages and problems in supplying Eaton's with pottery. The principal advantages were the size and timing of Eaton's orders: large quantities of wares were needed in what was typically Medalta's slowest period. The heaviest demand for stoneware containers occurred in the fall, when fresh supplies had to be preserved for winter consumption. In households across the country quantities of meat, eggs, vegetables and fruit were laced with salt, vinegar, or syrup and packed away in crocks. But the rush on stoneware ended in October when the pickling was completed. Starting in 1924, Medalta began manufacturing stoneware items for Eaton's during the plant's slow season. Eaton's arranged to purchase these items at a discount and marketed them for their November sales. Their orders included pantry jars, Brown Betty teapots, casseroles, jugs, and mixing bowls. By 1926, Eaton's was featuring the wares as part of their "Made in Canada" spotlight sale, proclaiming that "this year a new departure has been made in giving some of the stoneware a rich brown glaze that makes it suitable for table use."⁵²

Albert Pratt, in Medalta's Toronto-based agency, was particularly anxious to retain Eaton's as a client because of the nation-wide sales they commanded through their mail-order system. However, he emphasized to his brother Charles that reliability was critical, both in terms of supply and quality. With reference to an order for jugs placed in the early spring, Albert told him: "If we can keep them well supplied, from now on, they should use well on to 10,000 this summer. The point is that we must never be short."⁵³ He also sounded the alarm on a new line of embossed bowls Medalta introduced in the fall of 1926 when there was heavy breakage in a shipment to Moncton. Although Eaton's had included them in their mail-order for the last two catalogues, Albert warned that "if their customers return them, they will simply drop them from the Catalogue."⁵⁴

Scheduling production in anticipation of Eaton's orders was another of Albert's recommendations. For example, Christmas trade had to be solicited in May. This meant

⁴⁹J. Anderson to Medalta Potteries Ltd., December 30, 1926 (PAA 69.235/74).

⁵⁰C. Pratt to J. Anderson, December 11, 1926 (PAA 69.235/74).

⁵¹C. Pratt to A.W. Pratt, Ontario Representative, Medalta Potteries Ltd., November 22, 1927 (PAA 69.235/202).

⁵²Eaton's advertisement, November 1926 (PAA 69.235/59).

⁵³A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., February 25, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁵⁴A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., March 3, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

that Medalta not only had to have a full line of wares ready when the fall catalogue was released: Albert had to have suitable samples available in the spring so that Eaton's purchasers could make their selections. As he pointed out, the company did not always come through on time. "We have induced [Eaton's] to list the Brown Bowls in their Fall Catalogue, particularly for Christmas trade," he wrote on May 30, 1927. "We have about one hundred dozen 6" Brown Bowls here, but we would not let them go to Eaton's under any circumstances, as the finish is poor. In fact, we had difficulty in getting a sample to show them."⁵⁵

Charles Pratt must have trusted his brother's ability to deal with Eaton's, as he did not go to any lengths to obtain their business other than responding to Albert's suggestions. On the other hand, Pratt actively courted the business of the F.W. Woolworth Company because of the volume of business they could carry. In one month, for example, Woolworth's ordered just under 4,000 items including bowls, pitchers, mixing bowls, crocks, and churns – all seconds.⁵⁶ Total sales to Woolworth's in 1926 were over \$20,000.⁵⁷ Pratt tried a number of approaches in trying to win their orders. He offered them distinctive products like a "special brown mixing bowl" at the same price as the regular stoneware bowls. He lowered the price on cuspidors because it was brought to his attention that the Montreal stores wanted a better deal. He requested the Toronto manager to forward any suggestions on "how we can better serve the Woolworth stores, as we like to have all the business from them possible."⁵⁸ He even went so far as to send a credit note to cover the cost of several unsaleable items gathering dust at the Montreal store, saying "it is not our policy to have goods at any point which are of no value to our customers."⁵⁹

Despite the efforts Pratt went to in courting Woolworth's business, his good will was compromised by the company's inability to make shipments on time. A. G. Finningly, the Toronto manager, complained that an order placed on February 11 for the store's April sale was still not filled by early May.⁶⁰ Somehow, Pratt seemed to consider it a reasonable response to state that there "had been a very heavy call for similar items" and the stock was sent to the Vancouver store instead.⁶¹ Pratt's inability to see past the immediate problems at the factory made his responses to customer complaints seem somewhat obtuse.

While Woolworth's provided good business for Medalta, it was a source of frustration for Albert Pratt. Woolworth's was a discount store, and it dealt in Medalta's seconds in

⁵⁵A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., May 30, 1927 (PAA 69.235/201).

⁵⁶"List of Goods Purchased by the F.W. Woolworth Co. Ltd. During the Month of November," December 1, 1926 (PAA 69.235/131).

⁵⁷C. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., March 29, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁵⁸Correspondence, 1926 (PAA 69.235/131).

⁵⁹C. Pratt to the Manager, F.W. Woolworth Co. Ltd., Store No. 272, Montreal, February 11, 1926 (PAA 69.235/131).

⁶⁰May 4, 1926 (PAA 69.235/131).

⁶¹Accountant, Medalta Potteries Ltd., to F.W. Woolworth Co., May 15, 1926 (PAA 69.235/131).

order to offer low prices on the wares. This became a problem for Albert when Woolworth's began mounting window displays prominently featuring Medalta wares at virtually the same prices which he himself paid direct from the factory. Albert registered his protest with Charles:

As it stands now it is much cheaper for the retailer to buy his bowls from the Woolworth Co. than it is from us, and aside from that, it does not help us to create a trade and then kill it by allowing goods to be dumped in this way.⁶²

Albert assured Medalta that he would not permit Woolworth's to undercut his business, as the company was then "burning the candle at both ends."⁶³ Major clients like Eaton's and Woolworth's were a definite bonus for Medalta because they offered a high and consistent volume of business. However, the two clients were rivals in their own right, and Medalta stood to lose out altogether if it appeared to be servicing one company over another. It was also of critical importance that the company management in Medicine Hat did not deal at cross-purposes with its distributors elsewhere in Canada.

Pottery might not seem like a necessary component for running a railway, but some of Medalta's biggest clients over the years were railway companies. Dining cars and hotel restaurants had heavy requirements for table service. E. C. P. Cushing, Purchasing Agent for the CPR in Calgary, endeavoured to get Medalta as a supplier. He began by placing regular orders for 1/4-, 1/2- and 1-gallon crocks to be used in the CPR's Dining Car Service.⁶⁴ In the fall of 1926 he encouraged Medalta to develop a teapot which could be used on the railway lines and in the hotels. He repeatedly asked for samples, but Pratt had some difficulty perfecting the green glaze required for the orders. Pratt finally responded with disappointment in early 1927 that the samples did not come out of the kiln in satisfactory condition, as the glaze was off-colour. When Pratt eventually had samples which he felt were acceptable, Cushing responded on inspecting them, "I must be frank in expressing the opinion that they would not be suitable for our Dining Car Service. They are altogether too rough and unfinished."⁶⁵

Cushing suggested that Pratt should increase the price on the teapots in order to produce a better article. "Please do not think that our idea is to unduly criticise your product," he later wrote in a more encouraging tone. "What our aim has been and will continue to be is to encourage Western Industries to produce a product that is satisfactory to our services."⁶⁶ However, after almost six months of delays, Cushing's patience began

⁶²A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., March 16, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁶³A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., May 3, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁶⁴E.C.P. Cushing, Purchasing Agent, CPR, Calgary, to Medalta Potteries Ltd., April 5, 1927 (PAA 69.235/164).

⁶⁵E.C.P. Cushing, Purchasing Agent, CPR, Calgary, to Medalta Potteries Ltd., March 3, 1927 (PAA 69.235/164).

⁶⁶E.C.P. Cushing to Medalta Potteries Ltd., March 7, 1927 (PAA 69.235/164).

to wear thin. In the first place, orders given in December for teapots had still not been filled at the end of April. Even more upsetting was the fact that, without Cushing's authorization, Pratt substituted black teapots for green ones in filling one of the overdue orders – completely disregarding the fact that the CPR's table service was green and white. Under the circumstances, Cushing felt compelled to locate another source for the teapots in eastern Canada. "As you know," he told Pratt, "we have been endeavouring for some years to bring your products into use throughout our system generally, and it is indeed unfortunate that the Teapot end of it this year has turned out unsatisfactorily."⁶⁷

Medalta's production and shipping schedules suffered from continual delays, and in the end undoubtedly cost the company some customers. The Great Northern Railway Co., which operated out of Minnesota, provides one example of a thoroughly frustrated client. E.I. Plechner, Purchasing Agent for Great Northern, sent a requisition bid to Medalta in 1927 asking them to quote on Dinnerware for the Waterton Lakes Park Hotel. Medalta did not produce dishes and Walter Armstrong, office manager for Medalta at the time, sent a catalogue of other wares to see if he could interest Plechner in their stoneware lines.⁶⁸ On April 22, Plechner asked for a quote on thirty dozen coffee pots, tea pots, and cuspidors. Two weeks later, he repeated the request, and finally heard back from Armstrong on May 9.

On May 27, Plechner placed his order, specifying that he must have delivery by June 10. Although Armstrong assured him he could meet the deadline, the shipment was not received until June 15 and was short six cuspidors and almost half the coffeepots. By July 12 the order had still not been filled, and Plechner wrote in desperation, "This hotel is going to be opened on July 24th and it is absolutely necessary that we have the cuspidors and coffee pots remaining unshipped on hand for the opening date."⁶⁹ The day after the hotel officially opened, Armstrong replied that he would be unable to complete the orders until August 6. Plechner had no choice but to accept as the hotel had received some of Medalta's goods and, of course, required the rest to match. He did ask that Armstrong inform him if Medalta was unable to make the shipment as at that point he would be forced to purchase other items. Armstrong shipped the balance of the orders on August 8 with his apologies, and assured him that "any future orders will have our prompt and careful attention."⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, Medalta did not hear from Plechner again.

Medalta's clients, whether government or corporate, clearly experienced some difficulties in getting what they wanted from the pottery. Quality and reliability were uncertain, and clients were often left with shipments they could not sell, or with empty shelves on the eve of an advertised special. What kept them coming back? First, Medalta's

⁶⁷E.C.P. Cushing to Medalta Potteries Ltd., April 29, 1927 (PAA 69.235/164).

⁶⁸W.G. Armstrong to the Great Northern Railway Company, St. Paul, Minnesota, April 2, 1927 (PAA 69.235/191a).

⁶⁹Plechner to Armstrong, July 21, 1927 (PAA 69.235/191a).

⁷⁰W.G. Armstrong to E.I. Plechner, August 8, 1927 (PAA 69.235/191a).

wares were competitively priced, thanks to the advantages of cheap raw materials. And secondly, Medalta made such a diverse range of products, changing in response to shifts in consumer demand, that clients could return with renewed interest as new wares were developed.

DEVELOPING NEW WARES

Product diversification in this period of the plant's operations was tied to the production of new moulds. New wares were first modelled in clay, and then plaster moulds were made from the models. Bill Wyatt was the only staff member experienced in this work, and it fell to him to design the moulds in addition to his other responsibilities as plant superintendent. This work tended to be labour intensive and time-consuming, but once the moulds were made they could be used repeatedly. Where possible, the expense of making the models and moulds was billed to a client, but in most cases Medalta had to absorb this as part of its production costs.⁷¹

While many new wares were successfully developed during this period, the company's trial-and-error methods resulted in some problems as well. The large scale of Medalta's production meant that the company could not make experimental batches of new designs: wares were always manufactured and fired in bulk. The company was not equipped for experimental, small-scale production. While this caused no problem for successful designs, it magnified the expense of errors when something went wrong. It was possible that errors in design could remain unnoticed until the finished wares were shipped to the company's distributors and complaints began to come back to Pratt from the distributors themselves or from their customers. As a result, even simple errors in design or production could create expensive consequences for the company.⁷²

For example, Medalta developed a new mixing bowl in 1926. When Renwick & Cunliffe, the company's Vancouver distributors, received the shipment, they immediately wrote back requesting the old style. The new bowls had an embossed decoration on the front that caused problems when the bowls were stacked for shipment: either the edge of the boss or the rim of the bowl was chipped. When Renwick & Cunliffe unpacked their shipment, they found that 25 per cent of the bowls were damaged. "This is a defect in design," their letter of complaint concludes; "apparently the designer did not think forward any further than the appearance and did not take into account packing difficulties."

The principal complication associated with mould development was that it relied on the design of new shapes. Wyatt found simpler solutions to the problem of product

⁷¹C. Pratt to J.B. Carter, October 22, 1926 (PAA 69.235/50).

⁷²See Anne Hayward, "Medalta's Art Department: A Strategy for Product Diversification," *Material History Review* 39 (Spring 1994), pp.16-17.

variation, by modifying the sizes and surface designs of shapes that had already been developed. In fact, Medalta's three most successful innovations under Wyatt's supervision had little to do with new moulds. One of the first changes Wyatt implemented at Medalta was to convert the unit of measurement used in sizing crocks from American wine measures to Imperial gallons. He also developed advertising premiums known as *advertiques*, where a client's name was boldly printed on a pitcher or teapot, and the client could then give these away as promotional items to his own customers. And finally, in what historical hindsight would demonstrate to be his most significant decision, Wyatt founded Medalta's art department in 1929.

IMPERIAL GALLONS

The main competition Medalta faced in its stoneware lines was from American pottery manufacturers. The two biggest were Red Wing Union Stoneware in Minnesota and Robinson Clay Products in New York. The quality of Medalta's wares was comparable to that of its rivals, if we can believe company literature and the *Medicine Hat News*. Where Medalta was able to gain a competitive edge was in customizing its wares to suit Canadian customers. This was particularly apparent in the sizes of wares Medalta produced. For example, French Pans made in the United States would not hold five- and ten-pounds' weight in butter. Medalta, in response to its customers' demands, modified its French pans to hold these amounts, making them a little larger than the American ones.⁷³ In similar fashion, Medalta began sizing its crocks in Imperial gallons instead of the smaller US gallon, or 'American wine measure' as it was known. While it is not clear precisely why Medalta began using Imperial gallons, the change in size became an important marketing pitch for Medalta in pitting its wares against American competitors.⁷⁴

However, there was a larger issue at stake. Crocks and jugs were simply marked with a numeral to show their capacity, but American manufacturers were not required to label their wares as "wine measure." The wine measure was in fact smaller than the Imperial gallon, and therefore retailed at a lower price. Customers tended to choose the cheaper American-made crocks without realizing they were 25% smaller than Medalta's.

Albert Pratt felt that American manufacturers were capitalizing on the fact that the unit of measurement was not designated on the crock, and consequently customers were not alerted to the difference in size. He tried to get a ruling on unfair competition through the Department of Trade and Commerce, arguing that Ontario was being used as a dumping ground for the surplus stock of the large American plants:

⁷³C. Pratt to Mr. Ives, Proprietor, Belleville Pottery, February 2, 1926 (PAA 69.235/41).

⁷⁴C. Pratt to Walter Woods Ltd., September 27, 1926 (PAA 69.235/129).

During the past ten years they have forced three Ontario stoneware manufacturers out of business, and according to their present plans they intend cutting us off from this market.⁷⁵

The Department referred the matter to its Weights and Measures branch. However, after a thorough examination, it decided the question fell outside its jurisdiction.⁷⁶ Crocks, unlike 'bushels' or 'pecks' for example, were not used as a standard unit of measure for selling goods, and so differences in size could not be considered unfair.

The American manufacturers fought back by lowering their prices, capitalizing on the freight rates Medalta had to factor into its costs. Medalta had not increased the price on its Imperial gallon crocks, but there was an extra freight charge through the railways because the crocks were larger and heavier.⁷⁷ In turn, Albert began to pursue Robinson more aggressively, complaining about their unfairly discounted prices to the Customs Office in Toronto and directly to the Chief Appraiser. Charles promised to "go to Ottawa with [his] fighting clothes on" and take the matter up again with the federal government and the Tariff Department of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. He agreed that Robinson Clay Products was "making a dead set on stoneware business in Ontario," and determined to "play their game as far as it is possible for us to do so." In the meantime, he authorized Albert to lower his prices on crocks and jugs.⁷⁸

In the end, Albert and Charles Pratt decided that the best way to deal with Robinson's unfair competition was to market the Imperial gallon more aggressively. If the Department of Trade and Commerce could not force Robinson's to label their crocks correctly, the Pratts would provide all their retailers with advertising placards to place in their stoneware displays. They ordered 5,000 sheets to be printed on white cardboard in red and green letters, stating:

MADE IN CANADA
AT
MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA
THE ONLY IMPERIAL CROCKS
OBTAINABLE ON THIS MARKET
MEDALTA TRADEMARK
SUPERIOR SANITARY
QUALITY IMPERIAL CONTAINER
MEDALTA WARE

⁷⁵A.W. Pratt to Dr. F.W. Gershaw, MP for Medicine Hat, Ottawa, February 4, 1926 (PAA 69.235/71).

⁷⁶F.C.T. O'Hara, Deputy Minister, Department of Trade and Commerce, February 1926 (PAA 69.235/71).

⁷⁷W.G. Armstrong to R.T. Holman Co. Ltd., Summerside, Prince Edward Island, July 12, 1927 (PAA 69.235/193).

⁷⁸C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Company, Toronto, March 21, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

The tactic must have paid off, as the matter appears to have faded from discussion after the spring of 1927. Wyatt's Imperial gallon crocks won out, and the marketing opportunity afforded by the change in size ensured that Medalta's name became a familiar household word. And familiarity, in Medalta's case, bred a new business opportunity.

ADVERTISING PREMIUMS ♦

Charles Bailie and his brother ran a dairy farm in Brooks, about 150 kilometers west of Medicine Hat. In November of 1926, they decided to give their customers a little Christmas present: a Medalta pitcher with the name of their dairy printed on it. Bailie wrote to Charles Pratt, inquiring whether it would be possible. Pratt responded quickly:

Pleased to know that you are making money in the milk business in Brooks. We can supply a two-pint pitcher... at \$3.35 per dozen. The cost of the stamp to be an additional charge. We do not know what this stamp will cost, but probably in the neighbourhood of \$2.00. The stamp of course will be your property.⁷⁹

This inauspicious order for 80 pitchers was in fact part of a much larger picture: the production of advertising premiums, one of Medalta's more lucrative product lines. Premiums had been a rather sporadic business at first, falling more into the category of special orders. Clients included three butchers in Québec, and Medalta's own Toronto distributor, the Medicine Hat Pottery Company.

Things changed when the Ogilvie Flour Mills in Medicine Hat decided to distribute premiums through the individual merchants in western Canada who sold their flour. By 1927, Medalta was stamping the names of almost 150 merchants on over 12,000 mixing bowls, which in turn were being shipped throughout British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.⁸⁰ Each year, a different premium was selected from Medalta's household pottery items: pitchers, teapots, measuring cups – even a sugar and creamer set with a pattern of maple leaves twined around the rims. Meanwhile, the process of dealing with custom orders became more streamlined. From Pratt's rather uncertain letter to Bailie in 1926, the company formulated standard procedures and pricing by 1927: customers were to supply the stamps, and stamping was done at an additional charge of one cent per item, or at no additional charge on large orders of 1,000 or more.⁸¹

Medalta's customized service was an important tool for winning clients. Advertiques provided a simple means for giving customers products with individualized appeal. The

⁷⁹C. Pratt to C. Bailie, November 16, 1926 (PAA 69.235/44).

⁸⁰Ron Getty, *The Kilns of South Eastern Alberta* (Alberta: Author, 1994), p.20.

⁸¹C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto June 13, 1927 (PAA 69.235/201).

wares, while utilitarian, were given a unique look with the addition of a merchant's name or company slogan. The appearance of the pieces became an important factor in their marketability. Medalta consequently began paying more attention to the surface finish of its wares, and Wyatt began experimenting with colours and patterns on functional pieces. But the full transformation from utilitarian to decorative wares was accomplished with the establishment of the Art Department in 1929.

DEVELOPMENT OF ARTWARES

In February of 1927, Albert Pratt shipped an English Teapot to his brother Charles, asking him to take particular note of the colour. The black glaze used by Medalta on its teapots was not popular, he explained, stating that "the only way which we are able to sell them is to give a discount off our price list, and that business is not very profitable."⁸² From this rather innocuous observation developed one of the most important new departures in Medalta's history. With steadily increasing insistence, Albert pursued the idea of colourful glazes for Medalta's wares. Cut flower vases, bulb bowls, and other decorative items he felt should be finished in mat glazes or rustic finishes to appeal to changing popular taste. The reason? "We feel that we are not going to have the crock trade which we had last year," Albert said prophetically, "with the result that we must work into other lines."⁸³

Wyatt set to work developing glazes. The process was not straightforward: at one point, Charles reported to Albert that Wyatt was hard at work experimenting on various green glazes and had "six different mixtures in one kiln and he hopes eventually to work out a glaze that will be satisfactory."⁸⁴ After green he tried yellow, mauve, blue and brown with varying degrees of success. What he gradually realized was that the preparation of decorative glazes and designs was a full-time job in its own right. In 1929, he hired Thomas Hulme to head up Medalta's first Art Department.

Thomas Hulme was born in the town of Blackfordby in Leicestershire, England, in 1892.⁸⁵ He attended art college in England, and apprenticed at Wedgwood Potteries in Staffordshire.⁸⁶ He then taught arts and crafts in Blackfordby.⁸⁷ In 1929, at the age of 35 years, he emigrated to Alberta, bringing with him a letter of reference from Herbert Marriott, the Vicar of Blackfordby.

⁸²A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., February 22, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁸³A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., February 24, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁸⁴C. Pratt to A.W. Pratt, March 7, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

⁸⁵Interview with S. Albrecht (Thomas Hulme's daughter), Medicine Hat (July 30, 1992).

⁸⁶Interview with E.G. Phillipson (former plant manager and director of Medalta Potteries Ltd.) Medicine Hat (August 13, 1992).

⁸⁷Undated clipping from Blackfordby newspaper (ca. 1925-29); collection of S. Albrecht.

I have known Mr. Thomas Hulme since the year 1922 in the choir of Blackfordby Church and in other ways; and have much pleasure in recommending him to whom it may concern, believing him to be industrious and dependable as well as talented; and likely to be a valuable helper to those with whom he may work, and to deserve success in the sphere in which he may settle.⁸⁸

He came initially to Edmonton, in response to a posting advertised by the University of Alberta for an art instructor.⁸⁹ Apparently, the University of Alberta considered his credentials insufficient and wanted him to complete further course work. Instead, Hulme looked for other employment, and found it in Medicine Hat where he was hired by Wyatt. There, Hulme lived out the description which Vicar Marriott provided in his letter, working as head of Medalta's art department until the factory closed in 1954.

Hulme was responsible for designing patterns and decorations for Medalta's wares. Where Wyatt had concentrated primarily on developing moulds for new shapes and styles of pottery, Hulme developed stencils and stamps for decorating the surface. He also mixed the coloured glazes and lacquers used in decorating the wares. By 1930, the first artware was available for sale. Medalta was able to report it had been successful in marketing "a new line of decorative pottery vases, bowls, lamp stands [and] ashtrays" which were expected to augment its earnings.⁹⁰

Customers were soon ordering "artware" in addition to the stoneware products that were still the industry's staple. At first, items marketed as artware were simply standard products, such as a jug or teapot, with the surface decoration altered from a clear glaze to a decorative pattern. However, the surface decoration made a considerable difference to Medalta customers and became an important factor in their orders. For example, one customer complained to Medalta's Toronto distributor when what seemed to have been a minor change was made in his order. He was "very much annoyed" when he received 'Cottage' pitchers instead of 'Ship' pitchers and pointed out: "The result is that the Cottage Pitchers have not sold so that in the end you are out of that much business."⁹¹

The introduction of Medalta's artware changed the way that customers looked at objects which had previously been regarded as utilitarian. A jug was no longer a container for liquids: it sold or did not sell based on whether the decoration appealed to the customers. The art department's significance lay in its ability to supply patterns and designs that customers requested. Under Hulme, it evolved into a virtual service department, with its range of designs determined by customer preference.⁹² Response to Medalta's artwares was very strong. The decorated wares which Hulme developed were among the most popular items Medalta ever produced.

⁸⁸Letter dated April 5, 1929; collection of S. Albrecht.

⁸⁹Interview with S. Albrecht, July 30, 1992.

⁹⁰*Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. III, No 6 (June 1930) p.1.

⁹¹A.W. Pratt, Toronto to Medalta Potteries Ltd., January 8, 1935 (PAA 69.235/337).

⁹²Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat, August 13, 1992.

CHAPTER 5

HARDSHIP AND COMPETITION

The year 1929 marked a new phase in the history of Medalta Potteries, and of the Canadian pottery industry in general. It was a record year for Medalta: from its initial staff of 12 in 1916, Medalta had grown to 100 employees by 1929 and accounted for 75% of the pottery produced in Canada. Markets existed for Medalta's ware in every part of the Dominion from Halifax to Victoria.¹ But 1929 also saw two major changes in the company. In the spring of that year, Medalta was sold to a group of Calgary investors. Charles Pratt stayed on as President of the Company, but Ulysses Grant returned to his native North Dakota, and Bill Creer went to California to raise oranges.² The new owners, confident in their purchase of a growing and profitable company, were suddenly confronted with the widespread impact of the stock market crash of 1929. With the beginning of the Depression came a significant downturn in the pottery industry throughout Canada. Medalta was hard hit as well, and struggled to keep the company operating.

On March 15 1929, Pratt explained to a meeting of Medalta's shareholders that Reginald C. Carlisle and O. Clair Arnott of Calgary were to acquire Medalta for \$250,000. Carlisle and Arnott had no working knowledge of the pottery industry, but were interested in Medalta as an investment opportunity. Pratt along with Walter Armstrong and Bill Wyatt agreed to serve as Directors for the balance of the year to give the new owners time to familiarize themselves with the plant.³ Carlisle, Arnott, and the other Board members oversaw Medalta's operations from a head office in the Lancaster Building in Calgary. They communicated with the factory by daily correspondence transported by train between Calgary and Medicine Hat, with telegrams and night letters for urgent business.⁴

Pratt left Medalta in 1930 owing to ill health, and Armstrong was put in charge of the plant's daily production.⁵ This was difficult for Wyatt, who had been plant superintendent since he started in 1924. Armstrong had been hired initially by Medalta as a travelling sales agent to cover the province of Saskatchewan, and subsequently worked in the office as bookkeeper. He was familiar with the company's customers and accounts, where Wyatt was familiar with production. Coming from two different perspectives, they disagreed on how the pottery should be run. Matters came to a head when Armstrong

¹ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. II, No. 7 (July 1929), p. 1.

² G.B. Armstrong to M. Antonelli, University of Alberta, September 23, 1975; I. Bruce, daughter of W. Creer, to J. Forbes, University of Alberta, February 5, 1976 (CPIC, Correspondence Files).

³ Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of the Shareholders of the Medalta Potteries Ltd., 15 March 1929. (PAA 69.235/11).

⁴ March 21, 1938 (PAA 69.235/374).

⁵ W.G. Armstrong to the Deputy Provincial Secretary, Edmonton, February 12, 1930 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

hired Karl Baumler, a ceramic engineer trained in Germany, to develop clay bodies and glazes for new wares. Wyatt left the same year, and started up his own pottery in Redcliff in 1931.⁶

The dynamics of Medalta's management from 1930 to 1937 were largely dictated by the long-distance relationship between Medicine Hat and the company's head office in Calgary. Factory orders were centralized through the head office, but staff there had only a limited understanding of the plant's daily operations. Armstrong and Baumler clearly experienced considerable frustration with the Calgary group. Discrepancies and oversights in communications from head office were compromising on the factory floor. Specifications on style, colour, number, and even price were often left out. "You are still sending in orders for Yellow Polygon Bowls," Baumler admonished the Calgary office at one point, "despite they [sic] being discontinued for considerable time."⁷

A continual sore point in terms of company accounting was inventory control. Armstrong wanted to manufacture goods ahead of time for future orders, so that stoneware stock would be high when seasonal demand set in. He felt it was critical to start manufacturing in October for January deliveries. By 1935, head office cracked down and maintained the position that inventory on hand must not exceed \$30,000. Armstrong went ahead regardless of their concerns, relying on his own familiarity with Medalta's clients to justify his decision. A stream of harsh letters flowed from Calgary repeatedly telling Armstrong to follow the Board's instructions, culminating with the following order:

The Board says that [their] instructions have been ignored, and I in my capacity as Secretary must stress the importance of you carrying out the Board's instructions at once. The stock on hand must be reduced by a minimum of \$15,000 within the next 60 days.⁸

THE DEPRESSION

The preoccupation with inventory at Medalta's head office may have been related to worries about the economy. The impact of the Depression was felt most sharply between 1930 and 1933, followed by a slow and somewhat uncertain climb. The entire Canadian clay products industry was severely affected: the value of production plummeted from \$13.9 million in 1929 to \$2.2 million in 1933. In Alberta, sales dropped from \$1.3 million

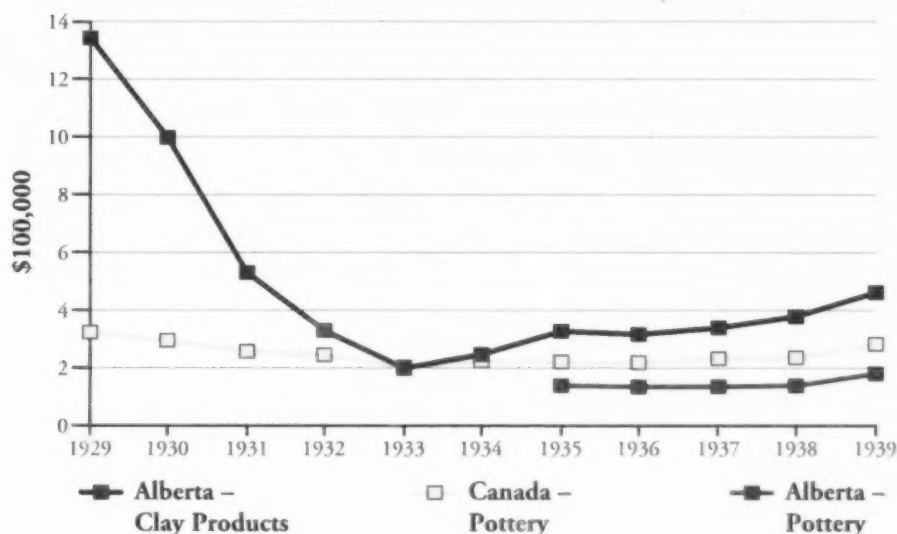
⁶Interview with B. Wyatt (son of J.W. Wyatt) Fergus Ontario, May 9, 1994; GB Armstrong to M. Antonelli, University of Alberta, September 23, 1975 (CPIC, Correspondence Files).

⁷K. Baumler to Medalta Potteries Ltd., October 5, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

⁸R.G. Smith, Secretary, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary to Walter Armstrong, Manger, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat, August 30, 1935 (PAA 69.235/352).

to a record low of just under \$200,000 over the same period.⁹ The following chart (Figure 7) indicates the drop in sales during the decade following the 1929 stock market crash, and the slow recovery starting in 1934.¹⁰

Figure 7
Sales of Clay Products and Pottery, 1929-1939



The years 1930 and 1931 were described by *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* as "subnormal years for the clay products industry."¹¹ Several plants in western Canada closed down, and the immediate future of the industry was tersely described as "not very bright."¹² It was not until 1936 that reports of improvement began to surface: Alberta Clay Products shipped a carload of flue lining to Victoria, and Medalta sent a carload of stoneware to Calgary.¹³ Walter Armstrong predicted a good harvest for 1936 and a consequent improvement in business:

⁹ *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada, 1939*. Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa, 1940).

¹⁰ Based on statistics reported in *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada, 1939*. Separate statistics for Alberta's pottery production were not maintained until 1935.

¹¹ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. V, No. 5 (May 1932), p.4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. VI, No. 10 (October 1933), p.3.

For the past five or six years the farmers and the residents of the West have been saving and cutting their purchases down to a minimum, but as we all know, there is a time when this must come to an end.¹⁴

Although sales began to pick up, the company's finances were still strained. The company had difficulty paying its taxes in 1934 and 1935. In 1937, the company declared a \$6,000 loss and applied to the provincial government for a reduction in taxation.¹⁵

By 1937, the Canadian clay products industry reported its greatest output since 1931, with a significant increase over 1936 production.¹⁶ The improvement was attributed to an overall growth in the construction industry, which resulted in greater demand for bricks, flues, and pipes. The pottery industry improved, but not to the same extent: it saw only a 6% increase in 1937. Alberta was slower to respond, showing less than 1% growth in 1937, but 1938 saw an increase of 11% and 1939 doubled to 22%. It was not until the outbreak of World War II that pottery production finally surpassed the record high established in 1929.¹⁷

COMPETITION FROM GLASS

Medicine Hat's pottery industry was hurt by the economic impact of the Depression, but it was crippled when this impact was combined with competition from glassware. Changes in production made glass cheaper and more available in the late 1920s and 1930s than it previously had been. As early as 1926, customers were complaining that stoneware prices were considerably higher than glass. One Winnipeg client who manufactured pickles and preserves asked for samples of five-inch stoneware bowls. Medalta offered to supply them at \$1.75, but was informed that glass bowls were available for \$1.36 including shipping and duty. "We prefer giving you this business to the Glass Companies," the client concluded, "but on the other hand we must protect ourselves."¹⁸

The situation grew worse when glassware began to make serious inroads in the liquor business, which had traditionally been a mainstay of Medalta's operation. The

¹⁴Letter to the Editor, *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. IX, No. 7 (July 1936).

¹⁵Final notices were sent to Medalta from the Deputy Provincial Secretary in 1935 and 1936, threatening to turn the company's overdue accounts over to the Attorney General's office for immediate action. In 1938, Medalta's President filed a "Statutory Declaration to be Furnished by Companies Seeking a Reduction in Tax under Section 18 of the Corporations Taxation Act (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

¹⁶*Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XII, No. 11 (November 1939), p.2.

¹⁷Figures taken from *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada*, Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

¹⁸D. Dyson, David J. Dyson Ltd., Winnipeg, to C. Pratt, August 20, 1926 (PAA 69.235/57).

change originated in Ontario where wine containers were re-used, and concerns were raised by the Health Department about the difficulty of cleaning stoneware thoroughly enough to prevent any public health risk.¹⁹ Medalta was first apprised of the situation by the Dominion Wine Growers of Oakville, Ontario which had used Medalta to supply their jugs. In 1927 Dominion received instruction from both Toronto and Ottawa that they were to use glass jugs as wine containers instead of stoneware ones. Charles Pratt attempted to fight the new regulations, arguing that stoneware bottles supplied to the soft drink firm of Gurd & Co. in Montreal were used, returned, and re-filled with no complaints. As an alternative, he also pointed out that stoneware jugs in the prairie provinces were not returnable: the value of the jug was simply included in the price of the wine, and the consumer kept the jug.²⁰

Albert Pratt took the matter up with Dr. W.J. Bell, Deputy Minister of Health. The only concession Bell offered Medalta was that if the neck and opening of the jug were widened, then the interior of the jug would be readily visible and could be thoroughly inspected prior to re-use. This requirement on its own could have been managed by Medalta, although it would have required a more expensive cork to fit the larger opening. However, Bell also stipulated that the interior surface had to be completely smooth. Because the jugs were made in two parts, namely the neck and the body, there was a distinct ridge at the shoulder where the two parts were joined. This shoulder would have to be eliminated and the jug formed in a single piece, a change which would double the cost of manufacture. Albert admitted defeat as he knew the wineries would not pay the difference in price. Glass was simply more economical: the glass jugs cost 15 cents each, as opposed to stoneware at 17½ cents; the shipping charges were less as glass was lighter; and the corks were smaller and therefore cheaper.²¹

The trend to glassware spread westward to the prairie liquor boards, and by 1931 Medalta was in trouble. Dominion Glass in the neighbouring town of Redcliff provided direct competition for Medalta's bottles and jugs.²² By the mid-1930s, the bottom had fallen out of the stoneware market. The Alberta Liquor Control Bureau conducted a public survey in 1935 to assess the demand for stone jugs as opposed to glass jars. An overwhelming majority preferred glass, for the reasons that the jar contents were visible, the glass was not so heavy and nicer in appearance, and the interior was easier to clean. Of the 22 towns surveyed, only two indicated a slight preference for stoneware: these were in agricultural communities where farmers re-used stoneware jugs either to carry water to the fields or to cut down for use as butter jars.²³ Consequently, the Bureau cut back its

¹⁹A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., October 10, 1927 (PAA 69.235/202).

²⁰C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto October 14, 1927 (PAA 69.235/202).

²¹Correspondence, PAA 69.235/202.

²²Interview with B. Wyatt, Calgary June 23, 1994.

²³R.J. Dinning, Chairman, Alberta Liquor Control Bureau to RG Smith, Secretary, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, January 7, 1935 (PAA 69.235/352).

orders for Medalta, requesting that the cars be only half-filled with stoneware; the other half was to be filled with glass jugs made in the neighbouring community of Redcliff.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The Depression years were difficult for the people who worked at Medalta. No one was guaranteed a steady job.²⁴ Sales were affected by the tough economic times and the stiff competition from glassware. Armstrong was under a great deal of pressure from Medalta's head office to keep labour and production costs down. Men were hired when the demand for wares was high, and then let go as soon as a production run was completed. Layoffs were common, especially during the summer months when there was not enough work to carry the plant.²⁵ Single men were in the most vulnerable position, but Armstrong reached the point where he was having to lay off married men as well. Bill Wyatt told his two sons, both working at Medalta in 1930, that they should give up their jobs in place of married men who were to be let go.²⁶

Head office operated on the assumption that Armstrong employed only as many men as were absolutely necessary, and Armstrong in turn had to justify the numbers of staff he maintained.²⁷ He apologized for keeping more staff than anticipated in December of 1935, but pointed out that he expected to close the plant down for at least two or three weeks in January.²⁸ Again in December of 1937 there was a rush to complete the year-end orders. But once the work was done, head office was informed, "Finished all the lamps today so laid off the Art Room employees."²⁹

When staff were laid off during slowdowns, a core group was retained to cover the plant's operations. Once the minimum stock was laid in, all the extra men were laid off. Only the key men were retained, and they were to be brought in only according to the amount of work to be done and sent home if not required.³⁰ These men moved from one department to another, depending on where they were needed. This made it difficult for staff at the head office to decipher the daily production reports for pay roll; however, it was a necessary practice when the plant was not busy.³¹

²⁴January 17, 1938 (PAA 69.237/382).

²⁵Interview with J. Clenell (former employee of Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries 1928-1939) Medicine Hat (July 20, 1996).

²⁶Interview with B. Wyatt, Calgary June 23, 1994.

²⁷Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary to Plant, December 26, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

²⁸W.G. Armstrong, Manager, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat to R.G. Smith, Secretary, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, December 31, 1935 (PAA 69.235/352).

²⁹E.A. Stone to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, December 6, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

³⁰Medicine Hat to Calgary, November 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

³¹Medicine Hat to Calgary, November 28, 1938.

Financial records for this period are incomplete, and it is difficult to determine what wages were paid to Medalta's employees. Three things emerge from the available records. First, it is clear that some men received higher wages than others, and for this reason a certain secrecy pervaded the distribution of paycheques. Cheques were delivered to each employee personally so that no one had an opportunity to compare.³² Secondly, it was not easy to question or complain about rates of pay at the factory. One young man who had worked at Medalta for over two years complained to John Robinson, MLA for Medicine Hat, that he was only being paid twenty cents per hour. It was easier for him to take up the matter with his political representative than with Medalta's management, as he was sure that if he made a formal complaint he would lose his job.³³ Thirdly, the legislation governing minimum wage in Alberta was changed in 1939. While the rate of 33 cents an hour remained the same, the age limit was reduced from 21 to 19 years. This raised the cost of labour, and consequently had a serious impact on the costs of manufacture. The Department of Trade and Labour somewhat paradoxically supported industries in circumventing the new legislation by encouraging them to take on young men between 19 and 21 as apprentices, starting at only 15 cents an hour.³⁴ There was consequently an increase in the number of low-paid apprentices working in Medicine Hat's pottery industry after 1939.

While work was uncertain through this decade, it is worth noting that most of the employees working at Medalta in 1940 had been with the company since it started.³⁵ It would appear that although employment might not have been certain from one month to the next, Medalta provided a fairly reliable source of work over the long term. And work at the plant retained its social aspect during these tough years: the softball team was still playing in 1938, and the company picked up the tab for the balls and bats.³⁶

Medalta survived the impact of the Depression and the loss of its lucrative business in stoneware jugs. The company managed to hold its own in depressed markets which had traditionally been dominated by pottery manufacturers in Britain and the United States. However, there were two other threats which Medalta had to face in this difficult decade: for the first time, the company began to face serious local competition. Disaffected employees left Medalta to form Alberta Potteries Ltd. in 1931, and again in 1937 to work for the newly-opened Medicine Hat Potteries Ltd.

³²E.A. Stone to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat, December 1937 (PAA 69.235/372).

³³J.L. Robinson, MLA to Mr. C. Adams, Chairman, Board of Industrial Relations, Edmonton, December 14, 1938 (PAA 69.131/2013-1032).

³⁴J.H. Yuill to Minister of Trade and Labour, July 5, 1939 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032); W.D. King, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, to C. Adams, Chairman, Board of Industrial Relations, July 10, 1939 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

³⁵Article on Medalta Potteries written by E.G. Phillipson for the *Lethbridge Herald*, April 11, 1940 (PAA 69.235/408).

³⁶E.A. Stone to Medicine Hat, September 2, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

ALBERTA POTTERIES LTD., REDCLIFF ♦

Jesse William Wyatt left Medalta in 1930. Dissatisfied with the new management which took over the company in 1929, Wyatt found the situation untenable by 1930 when Walter Armstrong took over as plant manager. He and his two sons Bill and Bert decided to set up their own plant, Alberta Potteries Ltd., in the community of Redcliff just west of Medicine Hat.

Wyatt found partners for the venture in three Redcliff businessmen: Cecil Hall, druggist, John Caine, miner, and James Baldry, mechanic.³⁷ But Wyatt had ambitious plans for the new plant, and needed more capital. In 1932, the company issued a prospectus offering the public "an excellent opportunity to become associated with a new industry which [its Directors] believe will grow with great rapidity." Two hundred shares were issued at the price of \$50 each.³⁸ Wyatt hoped to raise enough money to begin manufacturing white ware. In words reminiscent of Charles Pratt's, Wyatt pointed out that \$4.5 million in china tableware was imported into Canada annually. With local clay resources, cheap gas, and his own thirty years' experience in the industry, Wyatt felt he could compete for this trade. The chief products of the Alberta Potteries Ltd. were to be;

white ware pottery of a domestic nature, such as cups, saucers, bowls and dishes and also glazed tiles of various colours and shapes for bathrooms and other places, and for the manufacture of other kinds of pottery, plain or decorated.³⁹

The Wyatt's preparations took over two years. Shares did not sell as well as Wyatt had hoped: only 278 of the company's 750 shares were paid up by 1932.⁴⁰ Rather than the fully equipped factory which he had envisioned, Wyatt's plant was a typical Depression-era venture made almost entirely from recycled components.⁴¹ The pottery was set up in what had originally been an automobile factory: during World War I it had been turned into a munitions plant, and when the Wyatts took it over they had to remove all the machinery which was still sitting in the building. Equipment for pottery production was purchased from the old Gas City Pottery which William Clark had set up in 1916 across the road from Medalta. Wyatt even re-used the steel bands from Clark's kiln in building the kiln at Alberta Potteries. His sons constructed it, using 90,000 bricks including

³⁷Prospectus, Alberta Potteries Ltd., 1932 (Alberta Registries, File F-1650).

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Alberta Potteries Ltd., Registration as a Foreign Company, February 29, 1932 (Alberta Registries, File F-1650).

⁴¹Descriptions of the plant set-up are summarized from interviews with Bill Wyatt on April 26, 1993 (telephone interview), May 9, 1994 (at his home in Fergus, Ontario), and June 23, 1994 (at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta).

the glazed ones they set around the doorway for a decorative touch. The plant had no electricity, so the Wyatt boys got an old Chevrolet and drove it over to the pottery; all the tires blew and they ended up driving on the rims. They fixed up the motor to run on natural gas and used it as a generator for the factory's line shaft, with wooden pulleys retrieved from an adjacent building.

However, the early years were difficult ones for the pottery. The company did no business in its first two years. By 1933 the family realized there simply wasn't enough work for all of them, so Bert Wyatt returned to Ontario and began working for Sovereign Potteries which had just established in Hamilton. The three Wyatts drew no wages during 1932 and 1933 while they were building the plant and equipping it for operation: the first wages paid by the new company were issued in April 1934.⁴²

By the summer of 1935, Alberta Potteries had managed to gain a foothold in the industry.⁴³ The company produced a wide range of stoneware lines, including functional kitchen items and decorative artwares. Bill Wyatt designed the moulds and patterns, and put in jiggers for crocks sized up to 10 gallons. His sons made the wares with two other staff, Jack Kane and Jim Baldry, using clay from Eastend, Saskatchewan which they purchased by the boxcar. Wyatt began competing directly for Medalta's clients by offering



By 1935, Alberta Potteries was busy enough that Wyatt took on several employees. (Alberta Potteries employees: P333.3, MHM&AG.)

⁴²M. Perry, Alberta Potteries Ltd. to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, January 15, 1935 (Alberta Registries, File F-1650).

⁴³*Ibid.*

his crockery at less than Medalta's prices. Marshall Wells Ltd., one of Medalta's regular customers, contacted Walter Armstrong to inform him that they could obtain stoneware more cheaply from Alberta Potteries. Armstrong dismissed the Wyatt's pottery as nothing more than a small factory putting out a few crocks and bowls: "They have been cutting the price to try and get a little business, but we do not think this will last very long." Nonetheless, he was quick to add that Medalta would be glad to do whatever they could to retain Marshall Wells business.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Alberta Potteries spent the fall of 1935 improving and modernizing their power plant, and installed a new kiln which promised to treble their output.⁴⁵

Wyatt was confident enough in Alberta Potteries' prospects that he hired Martin Perry as a sales agent in 1935. Perry was successful in obtaining orders for the company. Bert Wyatt returned to Redcliff from Hamilton as it appeared that the pottery was on the verge of breaking into a more significant share of the market. However, it turned out that Perry was not as successful at bringing in payments. Wyatt eventually suspected that while Perry was collecting from the pottery's customers, the money was simply not finding its way to the company's account. He sold the pottery in June of 1936 and moved back to Ontario.⁴⁶ His son Bert had gone on ahead of the family to Hamilton, where he resumed working for Sovereign Potteries; Bill and his other son ended up at Smith Potteries in Oshawa.⁴⁷

Martin Perry took over Alberta Potteries with John ("Shorty") Matuska, a Medalta employee who bought into the company. But the plant did not survive long without the Wyatts: it struggled on until March 1937 when it stopped manufacturing altogether, and was struck from the Register in 1938.⁴⁸ That August, Medalta acquired an assortment of supplies from the defunct pottery including sponges, faucets, press washers, churn handles, and dashers.⁴⁹ There was initially some question as to whether the goods were under seizure and therefore unavailable for sale, but payments for the merchandise were accepted through an arrangement with Dominion Glass in Redcliff.⁵⁰

After a brief flourish, Alberta Potteries came to a quiet end. Although it had raised the threat of competition for Medalta, the company was too small and its production scale too limited to have ever really taken on the larger company. However, a second and much greater threat was posed by the Medicine Hat Potteries, a large and well-equipped

⁴⁴W.G. Armstrong, Manager, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat to Marshall Wells Ltd., Saskatoon, July 16, 1935 (PAA 69.235/361).

⁴⁵*Agricultural and Industrial Progress in Canada*, Vol. 17, No. 10 (October 1935), p. 158.

⁴⁶Interview with B. Wyatt, Fergus, Ontario (May 9, 1994).

⁴⁷Telephone interview with B. Wyatt (April 26, 1993).

⁴⁸W.S. Henry, Secretary, Alberta Potteries Ltd. to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, January 31, 1938 (Alberta Registries, File F-1650).

⁴⁹E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, August 23, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁵⁰E.A. Stone to Plant Superintendent, September 24, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

enterprise founded just when Alberta Potteries was starting to crumble. Part of the extensive enterprises of the Yuill family, the new pottery was built next to its parent company, the Alberta Clay Products, just down the railway spur line from Medalta.

RIVALS: MEDALTA CONFRONTS MEDICINE HAT POTTERIES ♦

In November of 1937, Medalta's Calgary management awakened to an unpleasant realization. Harry Yuill had decided to extend his clay products empire into the manufacture of pottery. The prospect of competition was not welcomed by Medalta's managers. Medalta had scraped through the worst years ever experienced by the pottery industry in Canada, and its position in 1937 was not secure enough to face a rival with any confidence. In fact, the company had just gone through another managerial shift: Arthur Cumming, who had been on the Board of Directors since 1931, took the business in hand at the request of the company's bondholders in 1937.⁵¹ Edward Stone, first hired by Armstrong as a bookkeeper, was moved to the Calgary office as Cumming's assistant.⁵²

While competition in a limited market was a serious concern for Medalta, the new pottery posed a more immediate problem before it even went into production. Medalta's key personnel were being actively wooed by the Yuill family for their new enterprise, the Medicine Hat Potteries. Medalta's production supervisor Karl Baumler and plant manager Walter Armstrong were approached by the Yuills, and both were clearly interested in the offer. Rumours of shifting loyalties reached the head office in Calgary, and Edward Stone was dispatched to Medicine Hat to investigate. Stone arrived on November 29 just in time to see Baumler leave for Medicine Hat Potteries. Two days later he reported back to Arthur Cumming:

I got it from one very reliable man in the plant that practically every employee has an application in for employment at the Yuill factory, so believe that we can reconcile ourselves to the fact that as soon as they are ready any employees they want from us will go to them.⁵³

Medalta's staffing was in crisis throughout December. Higher wages were offered to some employees in an effort to retain them, but the offer backfired when news of the increases began to spread. "Apparently," Stone explained to Cumming, "it is well known

⁵¹ *Financial Post* to Medalta Potteries Ltd., February 23, 1935; asking for verification of data which was initially gathered in 1931, prior to re-issuing the *Financial Post Survey of Corporate Securities* (PAA 69.235/359); *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXV, No. 3 (March 1952) p.7.

⁵² G.B. Armstrong to M. Antonelli, University of Alberta, September 23, 1975 (CPIC, Correspondence Files).

⁵³ December 1, 1937 (PAA 69.235/382).

that some employees have been given increases and this is causing dissatisfaction among a few who feel they are entitled to the same consideration."⁵⁴ When one of the men demanded an increase to 50 cents an hour, Stone wrote tersely, "He intends quitting unless this demand is met. This man is the best of the jiggermen we have left."⁵⁵ Cumming conceded, but warned that any raise was conditional on the understanding that "these men are going to stay with the firm and not hop out just when we need them the worst."⁵⁶

The simultaneous loss of Baumler and Armstrong left a serious void in the company's management. Stone filled the gap as best he could, but Cumming urgently needed him back in Calgary.⁵⁷ Finding a replacement manager for Medalta was no simple matter. Cumming and Stone bandied names back and forth, from former employees of Alberta Potteries in Redcliff to the desk clerk at the Cecil Hotel. But one was "absolutely no good," another was "very lazy," and regardless of ability, Stone did not think anyone would be interested in Cumming's offer of \$15 per week.⁵⁸ Unable to come up with an immediate solution, Stone concentrated on working with Ed Phillipson, a young ceramic engineer who had just started working at the plant in November. Phillipson was initially hired on the recommendation of Karl Baumler, who described him to Cumming as "a clean cut vigorous young man with a good opinion of his own capabilities." Although his ceramic experience was limited to his university training, Baumler felt this was not a significant drawback as long as Phillipson's salary expectations were "not too large."⁵⁹ Stone evidently agreed with Baumler's assessment and, through working with Phillipson, was able to get the situation at Medalta sufficiently under control that he was able to return to Calgary on December 18.

As an interim measure, Cumming tried to run the plant directly from the head office. But the Calgary staff had little understanding of pottery manufacture:

None of us here have been technically trained in ceramics and for that reason are not able to judge immediately upon receiving an order, whether there will be any difficulty in production. We can only judge if the price appears to be satisfactory.⁶⁰

Head office therefore requested detailed information on the entire process of pottery manufacture, starting from when the clay was first emptied off the rail cars into

⁵⁴December 4, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁵⁵December 6, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁵⁶December 7, 1937 (PAA 69.235/382).

⁵⁷A.D. Cumming to E.A. Stone, December 7, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁵⁸Stone to Cumming, December 8, 1937; Cumming to Stone December 9, 1937; and Stone to Cumming December 10, 1937 (PAA 69.235.370).

⁵⁹Superintendent's Office to A.D. Cumming, November 20, 1937 (PAA 69.235/369).

⁶⁰ED. Waines to Medicine Hat, July 26, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

the storage pit.⁶¹ They wanted all formulas for glazes and clay mixtures, and asked for full specifications on the manufacture of individual pieces. The level of detail requested incorporated everything from the labour and materials in making the patterns, moulds, jigging and finishing, including the type of clay used, and the weight and measurements of the finished product.⁶²

Medalta's head office focused primarily on financial management. While they might not understand the plant's manufacturing processes, the Calgary staff were adept at reviewing the factory's expenditures, literally scrutinizing every penny. When the factory first aid kit was replenished, the accountant choked on a bill from Boylan's drugstore for \$3.75:

In view of the fact that the Pingle Drug Company had a one cent sale, and in fact it may still be on, we hope that you did not pay the full price for these bandages at Boylan's.⁶³

Phillipson began to chafe a little under the constant inspection. Even orders for clay supplies had to be copied to head office, with the admonition that he "keep his stock of clay down as low as possible."⁶⁴ Calgary's attention to detail was apparently one-sided, as orders for essential factory supplies were ignored for days, weeks and even months. "We would appreciate more prompt correspondence," he complained bluntly after running short of machinery parts, nuts and bolts, faucets, and rubber rings.⁶⁵ Moreover, head office requirements seemed to work at cross purposes with the plant's operations. For its quarterly financial statements, head office required a complete inventory to be taken every three months. Phillipson was to have completed one by the end of December, 1937. In April of 1938, F.D. Waines wrote to Phillipson, criticizing his lack of attention to the inventory: crating room supplies had been omitted, as had decorating room supplies, clay on hand, and finished artware goods. Phillipson explained in his response:

You must realize that if this inventory is to be taken in two or three days it would take quite a number of men to do so, but as we cannot spare the men we must take it slowly and in such a way [as] not to interfere with the men's daily work.⁶⁶

⁶¹F.D. Waines to Plant Superintendent, January 6, 1938 (PAA 69.235/382).

⁶²F.D. Waines to E.A. Stone, December 15, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370); E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, January 25, 1938 (PAA 69.235/372).

⁶³E.A. Stone to Medicine Hat, April 7, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

⁶⁴E.A. Stone to Plant Superintendent, May 26, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁶⁵Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat to Calgary office, January 31, 1938 (PAA 69.235/372); Medicine Hat to Calgary, August 9, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁶⁶Medicine Hat to Calgary, April 11, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

The tight scrutiny of factory activities betrayed a certain awkwardness and distrust between Medicine Hat and Calgary, which persisted through December 1937 and the early months of 1938. Medalta's corporate identity was badly shaken by the chaotic staff departures during this period. Although there had been many changes in the company's management and administration prior to 1937, continuity had been maintained through individuals like Armstrong who had worked at Medalta since it opened in 1916. Now for the first time this continuity was disrupted as those familiar faces moved over to Medicine Hat Potteries.

Awkwardness surfaced to some extent in the daily operations of the plant, which suffered considerable disruption as employees tried to maintain production without the leadership of Armstrong, Baumler, and the foremen and senior staff who had gone. It was painfully apparent in what might be referred to as the corporate culture of the factory. For example, it had become customary at Medalta to let employees off an hour early on Christmas Eve. Naturally, this did not come up until December 24, when Stone had already returned to Calgary and Phillipson was answering to the position of plant manager. Phillipson had no knowledge of this custom. He told the employees that those who wished to leave could do so, but that if head office did not approve of their early departure, "it will be to the loss of those leaving at 3:30."⁶⁷ The time clock sheet shows that some men left at 3:30, while others stayed at work. Stone replied from Calgary on December 28 that the early departure was "quite in order," but this advice was obviously too late and the situation at the plant must have been somewhat awkward.⁶⁸ Sometimes head office was able to catch errors before they occurred. Phillipson deducted a half-hour lunch break from the timesheets of staff working on night duty – something that head office had never done. Fortunately Stone noticed the deductions, informed Phillipson of the company's position, and paid the men full time.⁶⁹

The sense of unfamiliarity and distrust emanated from Calgary as well. Staff at Medalta's head office seemed suspicious of the employees who remained at Medalta, uncertain whether their loyalties remained with the company or were prepared to switch to Medicine Hat Potteries. For example, in completing his detailed reviews of the factory's paperwork, Stone observed:

We notice that although the pay roll is up to its peak that the sales to employees are very low – much lower than usual. We are bringing this matter to your attention as it looks as though the boys might be helping themselves.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Plant Superintendent to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary December 24, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁶⁸E.A. Stone to Plant Superintendent, December 28, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁶⁹E.A. Stone to Medicine Hat, May 25, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁷⁰E.A. Stone to Medicine Hat, March 16, 1938 (PAA 69.235/374).

There were also accusations of deliberate breakage made against the staff in the shipping department. Concern must have been expressed openly, as an unsigned letter was finally sent from the factory directly to Mr. Cumming's attention:

With regard to your impression that something seems to be wrong with the shipment of cars, or things are done purposely to block us in some way I would like to say that much. As far as I am aware there isn't a single person in the shipping department who are [sic] doing any sabbotage [sic]. All these men perform their duties according to instructions With the exception of some mistakes that are being done unintentionally. However, the heavy breakage is becoming a very serious problem and at times we have to take the blame ourselves."⁷¹

Suspensions expressed by Cumming and Stone were probably based partly on the fact that Medalta staff members continued to migrate over to Medicine Hat Potteries through the spring and summer of 1938. Pay increases remained Cumming's method of last resort for retaining employees. Stone advised Phillipson in June of 1938 that he should give Tillie Schlenker, one of the senior women on staff, "a raise of say \$1.00 per week," adding that "we would like at least to hang on to some of the old hands, particularly the girls."⁷² Stone finally admitted he was very puzzled that Baumler was getting all his help from amongst Medalta's staff. "It is a mystery," he told Phillipson, "because I happen to know that... Carl [sic] had a very poor opinion of anyone working in the factory."⁷³

Stone watched Medalta closely during the first part of 1938, his careful eye picking up any irregularities in the factory's operations. His other eye he kept trained on Medicine Hat Potteries, and he encouraged Phillipson to spy on the new plant to the best of his ability. He was concerned that Medalta's sales would start to drop as soon as the Yuill's plant went into production, and was anxious to get any information he could on the new pottery's wares and clients. He told Phillipson:

You might keep us informed as to the progress of our opposition, especially as to whether they are actually shipping goods and if not when they expect to be able to ship. You might also ascertain what orders they are working on, if any.⁷⁴

Medalta's staff began to feel the pressure of competition when they had to deal with a new agent in Ontario. Albert Pratt stopped working for Medalta early in 1938 and reverted to his original line of work as a manufacturers' agent. Albert, brother of

⁷¹Medalta to Mr. Cumming, March 24, 1938 (PAA 69.235/374).

⁷²E.G. Phillipson to Calgary, June 7, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁷³E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, May 26, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

Charles Pratt, had worked as Medalta's Ontario distributor since 1927. His Toronto agency, the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., was taken over by William T. Clarke, formerly an insurance and securities salesman.⁷⁵ Cumming was anxious to impress Clarke with the quality of Medalta's wares. Stone warned Phillipson that Cumming wanted "nothing but first class goods" to go in the first shipment to the Medicine Hat Pottery Company: "in fact he wants them to be so good that the loaders will be perfectly willing to sign an affidavit that anything they put into the car was in first class condition."⁷⁶

Apparently, Clarke was not sufficiently impressed. By May of 1938, it became clear that the Yuills had purchased the business of the Medicine Hat Pottery Company in Toronto.⁷⁷ Medalta was forced to change agents, and began using Brown & Hargrave of Toronto as their distributor. Worse was to follow. Medalta began losing distributors, customers, and even suppliers to their "opposition." In July, James McQuillam & Co. of Montreal transferred their business from Medalta to Medicine Hat Potteries.⁷⁸ In the same month, Woolworth's began carrying wares from Medicine Hat Potteries.⁷⁹ And in September, when Medalta tried to place an order for clay with Dick Dempster of Eastend, he replied that his entire output was contracted to the Yuills.⁸⁰

The Yuills seemed to have little trouble in displacing Medalta's wares in the market place. By the end of 1938, Medicine Hat Potteries was shipping dinnerware, ovenware, and original Western Canada art pieces as far afield as Australia.⁸¹ Their colourful dinnerware was not only more successful, but less expensive than Medalta's dishes. As one Medalta agent pointed out, "Medicine Hat [Potteries] have coloured goods in their line at very much less than what I can sell [yours] for."⁸² When Cumming decided to discontinue the production of lamp bases in 1941, Medicine Hat Potteries moved in quickly to fill the gap. By April, they had sold 10,000 bases in Toronto alone.⁸³

Suspicion and espionage may have characterized the early rivalry between Medicine Hat Potteries and Medalta. However, by the late summer of 1938 Medalta began to cultivate a new approach. It started when Medalta was short on dashers for a shipment of churns. Rather than waiting for its regular supplier to come through with the order, Medalta

⁷⁵E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, May 28, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376); City of Toronto Directory, 1938.

⁷⁶E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, January 21, 1938 (PAA 69.235/372).

⁷⁷E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, May 26, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁷⁸F.D. Waines to Plant Superintendent, July 13, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁷⁹Note on Calgary letterhead, July 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁸⁰R. Dempster, Eastend, Saskatchewan to Medalta Potteries Ltd., September 5, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁸¹*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XII, No. 12 (December 1939), p. 1.

⁸²L.H. Melville, Medalta Sales, to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta Potteries Ltd., July 9, 1940 (PAA 69.235/404).

⁸³T. O'Connor, Johnson & Barbour, London Ontario to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta Potteries Ltd., undated; ca. April 1941 (PAA 69.235/408).

purchased what it required from Medicine Hat Potteries.⁸⁴ A month later, Cumming started asking Phillipson whether the time was right to begin negotiating with the opposition. While he clearly bore a grudge against the staff who had deserted him, he seemed anxious to reach some kind of understanding with their new employer.

Do you believe that Yuill is now in the proper mood, or position, that I could talk to him about prices? If you think he is I would come down immediately and go into it with him, but I do not want anything to do with Armstrong or Baumler in connection with it.⁸⁵

By September, Medalta was manufacturing fifty-gallon crocks for the Yuills, and putting Medicine Hat Potteries labels on them. Moreover the work was done at a 50% discount.⁸⁶

Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries emerged as the two major players in Alberta's pottery manufacturing. The relationship which evolved between them went from intense rivalry to guarded suspicion, and finally a kind of studied ignorance regarding each others' activities. The companies in the end were not direct competitors as they sought different market niches for their wares. Hop Yuill observed many years later that the two potteries should have worked together, sharing supplies, technical staff and sales personnel. They would have effected "great economies" in comparison with the individual operations they pursued.⁸⁷

⁸⁴E.A. Stone to Medicine Hat, July 26, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁸⁵A.D. Cumming to E.G. Phillipson, August 17, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁸⁶A.D. Cumming to Mr. Yuill, September 14, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁸⁷J.H. Yuill to R.M. Hungerford, Clayburn Company Ltd., Vancouver BC, April 28, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

CHAPTER 6

EFFICIENT PROCESSES

To this point, we have looked at the pottery industry as a series of entrepreneurial ventures. This chapter and the one which follows take a brief departure from the pottery industry's chronology. Having seen the industry well established in Medicine Hat, and the emergence of the two most significant potteries, we will briefly examine how the factories operated. This involves an examination of two things: manufacturing processes, and product development.

Charles Pratt observed that "the story of civilization can best be told by following the trail of clay."¹ The manufacture of clay products had been going on for thousands of years by the time the potteries of Medicine Hat began firing their kilns. However, in many respects the processes involved in making pottery were remarkably unchanged. Raw clay had to be mined and processed. For centuries, it was then shaped on a potter's wheel – an invention which still lay at the basis of Medicine Hat's modern counterpart, the "jigger wheel." Shaped clay was then glazed and fired to make it waterproof and durable.

Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries followed each of these stages in their factories. The difference between their operations and those of the preceding centuries lay in the technology of production. The machinery used in the modern plants facilitated mass-production. However, the technology really affected only the scale and speed of manufacture. The processes themselves remained time-consuming and labour-intensive. In the 1930s, potteries began looking for more efficient and economical methods, directed at saving time and money.

MANUFACTURING PROCESSES

The first step in pottery manufacturing was to obtain suitable clay. The clay material as it emerged from the ground was not ready to use: it required extensive preparation before it could be shaped and fired. Raw clay was brought in from Saskatchewan, where it had been blasted out with dynamite from under 26 feet of soil. It was shipped to the factory by railway car, as it was more economical to transport the clay to the gas, than to provide heat and power at the clay beds. A blend of clays was shovelled into a washer, or 'blunger,' and mixed with boiling water. This mixture was stirred for about an hour until it was a uniform, soupy consistency. The liquid was then passed over a rotary screen to filter out sand and other impurities. The cleaned clay soup was then stored in large vats, where it was stirred continually by an agitator until it was needed. At that point, it was pumped through filter presses to remove the water. The clay was then processed in a pug mill, where it was beaten to an even consistency and air pockets were removed with a vacuum.

¹Quoted in H.A. MacLeod's "A Success in Clay," *MacLean's Magazine* August 15, 1928.

Once the clay was prepared, it was ready for shaping. In small-scale operations, shaping could be done by hand on a potter's wheel. However, industrial fabrication required mechanized techniques to allow for mass-production. The only way to turn out large quantities of wares in a short period of time was to use moulds for shaping the clay.

Mould production was the most demanding area of pottery manufacture. To begin with, a skilled craftsman made a model, or pattern, out of clay. From this pattern a master mould was created. After being thoroughly dried and soaped to protect its fragile surface, the master mould was used to create hundreds of manufacturing moulds which were used in the factory. The patterns, if well looked after, lasted indefinitely. The moulds, made from Plaster of Paris, could be used repeatedly before they wore out and had to be re-made. Typically, each mould was used only once a day so that it had sufficient time to dry out. Otherwise the plaster deteriorated much more quickly and was susceptible to chipping and cracking. Moulds for slip casting lasted for about 50 to 75 pieces, while those for jiggering could be used 150 times.²

Slip casting and jiggering were the two principal methods used for moulding clay. Slip casting was a simple process which could be completed by labourers in the factory. It was used for making asymmetrical pieces like handled pitchers, or for variegated shapes like vases and lamp bases. Jiggering was a more difficult process requiring skill, speed and dexterity. It also required teamwork: jiggering was done in teams of three, with two labourers supporting the more skilled position of the jiggerman. This process was used for making items like dishes and platters, or "flatware," and for "hollow ware," such as cups and bowls.

The manufacturing moulds used for slip casting had a square or rectangular exterior. The interior of the block held the inverse shape of the piece, taken from the original pattern. The mould could be formed in a single piece, if the item it was designed to reproduce was widest at the top. Two-piece moulds were split down the centre to form identical halves. Some moulds consisted of three pieces with a separate portion for the foot, or base, of the item. Complex forms required more complicated moulds: for example, a buffalo figurine designed by Bill Wyatt required a mould with over thirty separate parts.³

The moulds were filled with clay slip, a liquid mixture of prepared clay and water. The plaster acted like a sponge, sucking the water out of the slip. The clay took about thirty minutes to harden along the contours of the mould. Excess slip was drained by turning the mould upside down. The remaining clay was left in the mould to harden and dry for several hours, and then removed when the piece was sufficiently hardened. Unmoulded wares were sponged to remove any rough edges and prepare the finished surface. Depending on the desired finish, the wares were then ready to be glazed or fired.

²E.D. Waines to Plant Superintendent, December 24, 1937; Plant Superintendent to Medalta Potteries, Calgary, December 29, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

³Interview with B. Wyatt, son of J.W. Wyatt, Calgary (June 23, 1994).

In jiggering, the manufacturing mould was a single piece designed to shape one side of the pottery ware. A measured portion of soft clay was put on the mould, and pressed against it to take the mould's impression. The mould was then centred on a revolving wheel similar to a traditional potter's wheel, which spun around at speeds of 150 to 400 revolutions per minute. There, the jiggerman lowered a steel template tool against the clay to shape its other side.

Jiggermen were the highest-paid employees on the factory floor. In 1938 they were paid as much as 50 cents an hour, when the minimum wage was set at 33 cents an hour. However, to keep them as productive as possible, both Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries paid their jiggermen by the piece. For this reason, the jiggermen concentrated on working at the wheel where they earned their money, and had helpers to fetch and carry their moulds, clay supplies, and finished pieces. They were hired directly by the jiggerman and paid out of his wages. With a good team, a jiggerman could make several thousand pieces a day.

Each team consisted of three people: the jiggerman himself, a "mould runner" and a "batter-out." Jiggering was always done by men, but the assistants could be either male or female. Often the positions were filled by young boys who learned the jiggerman's craft by example and observation.⁴

The job of the batter-out was to place the clay on the mould – in fact, he threw it as hard as he could:

Taking a flat, round disk of clay in his hand, he lifts it high in the air, then hurls it with great force and dash against a plaster mould on the bench in front of him. He hurls the piece of clay almost as if he were in a frenzy of anger, and it hits the plaster target... with a resounding smack.⁵

The vehemence of the impact knocked all the air out from under the clay, preventing any creases or folds from forming. "You have to put a lot of muscle into it," one man explained. "After a while you get pretty strong fingers and wrists."⁶ The filled mould was then placed on the spindle of the jiggerman's revolving wheel. When the jiggerman had finished shaping the clay, the mould with its formed clay piece was removed. As fast as the pieces came off the wheel, they had to be stacked up on racks and taken to the drying area. This was done by the runner, who also brought fresh clay for the batter-out as it was required.

Productivity was essential to success as a jiggerman, and good help was essential to productivity. Jiggermen were therefore prepared to pay well to get the help they needed. In one pay period, for example, jiggerman R. Thompson received \$81.31 on piecework.

⁴J.H. Yuill to the Minister of Trade and Labour, Edmonton, July 5, 1939 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁵"The City of a Thousand Skills," *Hamilton Spectator*, September 27, 1958.

⁶*Ibid.*



Of this amount, he retained \$37.18 and paid his helpers Ed and Ernest Paulson \$27.63 and \$16.50 each (see Figure 8 below).⁷ However, competition amongst jiggermen to get the best help could be costly. On one paycheque, E. Adel received considerably less than his two helpers, leading the payroll clerk to speculate that he was "paying too much for his help in comparison to the goods he [was] turning out."⁸

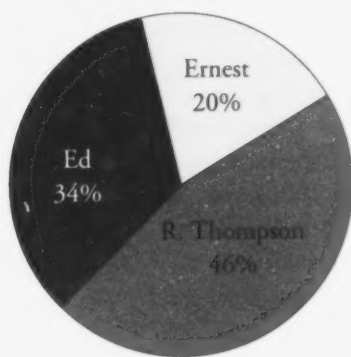
Once the clay pieces were moulded, whether by slip casting or jiggering, the wares had to dry thoroughly before they were glazed. Pottery to be finished by the decorators in the art room was sent over at this point for stamping, stencilling, or decals. The dry wares, whether plain or decorated, were then ready for glazing.

Glaze was a thick liquid glass composition which melted and fused to the pottery when heated in the kiln. The glassy coating was useful, as it provided a smooth surface which was easy to clean. It also improved the appearance of the pottery, giving a lustrous and colourful finish. In order to obtain uniform and complete coverage, pottery was either immersed in the glaze mixture by dipping, or given a fine coating with a spray canister.

The wares, once coated with glaze, were left to dry on the drying racks and the liquid glaze turned to a fine powder. When fired, the glaze mixture melted and spread evenly over the wares, creating a smooth, glassy finish.

Glazing was a chancy aspect of the manufacturing process. It was very difficult to obtain the combination of ingredients which would ensure the desired colour, and create a surface free of cracks and other imperfections. Potters were actually quite restricted in the range of colours they could produce, as Medicine Hat Potteries explained in one of

Figure 8
Jiggerman's Earnings (1937 wages)



⁷Medalta Potteries Ltd. to Calgary office, December 23, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁸E.A. Stone to Plant Superintendent, December 22, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

its brochures: "Heat does strange things to colors – some fade completely, others change entirely in their hue, and some are brightened."⁹

The compounds for making glazes were generally acquired from supply companies. However, Kari Baumler and Ed Phillipson both experimented with locally-obtained minerals to devise new glazes. Jimmie Clenell, who worked with Karl Baumler at both Medalta Potteries and Medicine Hat Potteries, experimented with crushed feldspathic rock and flint mixed with lead carbonate, chalk, and ball clay. The door to the glaze room was locked when Clenell weighed and mixed his chemicals. No disturbances were permitted, as the risk of disruption and error was too great. Even Baumler had to wait outside. Small test batches were produced at the factory and, if they proved successful, the formulas were sent to Ferro Enamels in Ottawa where the mixtures were produced by the ton. The whole process from test to mass-production took from two to three months.¹⁰

The final stage of the manufacturing process was firing, where the pottery was heated in the kilns. At extremely high temperatures of between 1000° and 1400°C, the soft, porous clay was transformed into a hard, stone-like product. Smaller pottery wares were placed in "saggars," or ceramic containers for support and protection during the



Shaped pottery wares were dried, and then loaded into the kilns for firing. (Medalta kiln: M5827, Glenbow Archives.)

⁹"A Brief Sketch of Pottery Manufacturing In Our New, Modern Plant," Medicine Hat Potteries, c.1938 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

¹⁰Interview with J. Clenell, Medicine Hat (July 20, 1996).

firing process. Larger pieces like crocks were placed directly in the kilns. To fire the wares in the old-fashioned beehive kilns, the saggars were carried in and stacked from floor to ceiling. The doorway was then sealed and the kiln chamber heated. It took about two days to reach the firing temperature and then cool down again. In tunnel kilns, the saggars and crocks were loaded into cars which moved through the kiln chambers to fire and cool. From entrance to exit took between thirty and forty hours, depending on the type of ware.

Pottery manufacture was in some respects a rather risky business. Production was broken down into many stages, from preparing the raw clay to removing the finished wares from the kilns. Every variable in the manufacturing process provided the potential for disaster: the clay, the kiln temperature, the glaze composition and consistency. All aspects of production had to be precisely monitored to ensure that the wares came out successfully. If anything went wrong along the way, an entire kiln load could be wasted. The continual uncertainty of the manufacturing process had a significant impact on how the potteries operated. Owners and managers were preoccupied with eliminating errors, reducing costs, and mechanizing work processes. Increasingly, manufacturers looked to specialists to help them with these issues.

CERAMIC ENGINEERS: 'INSTRUMENTS OF IMPROVEMENT' ♦

The specialists in the clay products industry included ceramic engineers. Their training covered the chemistry of ceramics and the engineering of mass-production. Ohio State University was the first university in North America to offer Ceramic Engineering.¹¹ One of the first graduates of its program was Wolsey ("Jack") Worcester, who finished in 1899. He subsequently established a Ceramic Engineering department at the University of Saskatchewan in 1921.¹² Worcester's four-year program covered general engineering in the first year, followed by increasingly specialized courses in ceramics including fuels and combustion, pyrometry, and ceramic research and design.¹³

Worcester's involvement with the University followed a nine-year stint in the industry. He had worked in Canada and the United States as a Ceramic Engineer, and helped set up the Tregillus Clay Products Plant at Calgary in 1912.¹⁴ Worcester maintained his

¹¹T. Thorvaldson, Professor of Chemistry to Pres. J.S. Thomson, University of Saskatchewan, February 18, 1942 (U of S Archives MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

¹²*Biographical Directory of American Men of Science*, 7th Ed. (U of S Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers, MG 32S1 Accn. 73-6).

¹³Ceramic Engineering Curriculum, University of Saskatchewan (U of S Archives, MG 3261 Accn. 73-6).

¹⁴W.G. Worcester to H.A. Sylvester, Lexington, Kentucky, April 27, 1931 (U of S Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers, MG 32S1 Accn. 73-6).

industrial ties after he entered academics, working closely with a number of plants in Saskatchewan and Alberta. His primary research was devoted to clay exploration and testing in southern Saskatchewan, but he also advised manufacturers on ways to improve their products and processes. In Alberta, he maintained a regular correspondence with Herbert Sissons, Manager of the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company, whom he respected as an innovator in the industry.¹⁵ He also visited the Medalta plant on several occasions when Charles Pratt was general manager. However Pratt was "not impressed with his ability," stating that although Worcester had been in the factory two or three times he had not been able to offer any advice or suggestions to help the company.¹⁶

Worcester's students initially gravitated eastward after graduating. Opportunities in eastern Canada and the United States were more plentiful, and the program normally had only three to six students each year. Employment prospects in western Canada were crippled by the Depression. Worcester advised a prospective student in 1932:

At the present time, chances of obtaining employment after graduating in Ceramics are indeed very slim, in that practically every ceramics plant is closed down and [has] no immediate prospects of opening. Some of our past graduates are at the present moment out of employment.¹⁷

By the late 1930s, the situation began to change and Worcester's program began to have an impact on Medicine Hat's pottery industry. Richard Welch, who graduated in Ceramic Engineering in 1939, was hired by Medicine Hat Potteries in the same year.¹⁸ L.J. Ellis started at Medalta Potteries in 1938, remaining there until 1941 when he moved over to Medicine Hat Brick & Tile.¹⁹ And Ed Phillipson started at Medalta in 1937, continuing there until the company's bankruptcy in 1954.

Why the sudden interest in ceramic engineers? Proponents of the discipline had long argued that the clay products industry required specialists to lead it into the modern era of production. Robert Montgomery, head of the ceramics department at the University of Toronto, stated as early as 1928 that "the technical man is a new instrument to improve quality and reduce cost."²⁰ New manufacturing methods were emerging in the 1930s which

¹⁵W.G. Worcester to H.J. Sissons, December 23, 1932 (U of S Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers, MG 32S1 Accn. 73-6).

¹⁶C. Pratt to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto February 28, 1927 (PAA 69.235/200).

¹⁷W.G. Worcester to E.G. Berg, Bromhead, Saskatchewan, December 13, 1932 (U of S Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers, MG 32S1, Accn 73-6).

¹⁸*The Clay Products News and Ceramic Record* Vol. XII, No. 7 (July 1939), p. 1.

¹⁹Prof. W.G. Worcester, University of Saskatchewan to G.C. Keith, Editor, *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, August 12, 1941 (UofS Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

²⁰R.J. Montgomery, "The Technical Development of Ceramics in Eastern Canada," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. I, No. 9 (December 1928) p.4.

emphasized efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Medicine Hat Potteries had incorporated these innovations in its facility, constructed in 1937. Hop Yuill continued to investigate new technologies, adding machines and equipment as they became available. Medalta was anxious to catch up with "the opposition," and began exploring some of the new management techniques and production methods.

MANAGING THE MANUFACTURING BUSINESS ♦

The success of the pottery industry largely depended on making wares which people wanted to buy. But offering new products was only half the solution. Companies had to be able to develop and produce new wares efficiently and economically. Successful manufacturing processes were as important as popular products. A balance had to be maintained between what the plant could afford to make, and what customers wanted to purchase.

Medalta Potteries produced a wide range of wares during its history, and changes in its product lines were mirrored by changes in production. The company had started out in 1915 with second-hand resources, using the building and equipment of the failed Medicine Hat Pottery Company. The plant was gradually re-tooled through a series of incremental modifications – a new machine one year, a change in process the next. Equipment and methods were adopted as new wares were developed. Specialized tools became available, making efficiency an increasingly important consideration in the factory's layout and manufacturing processes.

Two main periods of activity can be identified in Medalta's technological development, engineered by Bill Wyatt around 1924, and Ed Phillipson after 1938. Bill Wyatt was the first person to look at the plant with the experienced eyes of a trained potter. While most of his efforts were directed at product development, he also introduced some labour-saving devices. He installed rail tracks to move wares more efficiently inside the plant, and coordinated an expansion of the plant's facilities in 1927. A more concerted effort to modernize the plant was undertaken by Phillipson. In 1937, when he first saw the factory, Medalta was becoming obsolete: Phillipson's first impression was that it resembled a "collapsing museum."²¹ He expanded the plant and built new tunnel kilns, more efficient than the old-fashioned downdraft "beehive" kilns used at Medalta until his arrival. He also obtained mechanized equipment for pottery manufacture, and streamlined the plant's manufacturing processes.

Both Wyatt and Phillipson were accountable for the resources they spent on upgrading plant facilities. Wyatt reported to Charles Pratt, who prided himself on keeping costs to a minimum. Phillipson reported to Arthur Cumming, whose tendencies toward economy resembled Pratt's. Cumming watched the company finances so closely that he wanted the factory employees paid in cash to save the cost of issuing cheques.²² When Phillipson

²¹Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (December 4, 1994).

²²Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (August 13, 1992).

wanted to replace the company's ancient pug mills, essential tools for blending the clay immediately prior to use, Cumming was skeptical: "We cannot see why we should be forced to buy new pug mills," he complained, "because we feel that the parts that are worn can have new parts cast."²³ Yet the factory lost half a day of production each time the pug mill broke down.²⁴ Despite the cost to the company, Phillipson was constantly reminded to keep his expenses in line, and encouraged to use second-hand or recycled materials.

Medicine Hat Potteries developed along entirely different lines. The Yuills built the pottery from the profits of their lucrative sewer pipe plant, the Alberta Clay Products Company. With money to spare on design and equipment, they built a factory of steel, brick and tile to house the latest innovation in pottery technology: a circular tunnel kiln. With its seventy-foot diameter, it was the largest tunnel kiln in Canada.²⁵ The gas-fired kiln had a continuous rotating hearth which carried pottery wares through three chambers, each with separately maintained temperatures: a preheating zone, a firing zone and a cooling zone.

The pottery complex included office space, a drafting room and laboratory in addition to the factory itself, with its 36,000 square feet of floor space. The *Clay Products News* described Medicine Hat Potteries in a feature article as a "model plant":

With multi-windowed walls, good lighting facilities, and the finest pottery-working machinery available, this factory creates the impression of efficient and advanced technique in pottery manufacturing.²⁶

The pottery also made headlines in *Western Business & Industry*, not only for its innovative technology, but for its modern approach to staff relations. The plant depended on the skill and craftsmanship of its employees; therefore, "providing them with working conditions of an exceptionally high standard – clean and bright, comfortable, healthful and modern – is part of the basic policy of Medicine Hat Potteries."²⁷ Evidence of consideration for the workers was everywhere: abundant natural light, modern safety devices, comfortable working temperatures, a soft drink cooler, an ice water fountain, and even loudspeakers which played radio programs and record selections at intervals throughout the day.

²³A.D. Cumming to E.G. Phillipson, September 12, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

²⁴Medicine Hat to Calgary, April 6, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

²⁵Sovereign Potteries in Hamilton had installed a tunnel kiln in 1936 with a 50-foot radius (J.T. Robson, "Tunnel Kilns – The Sovereign Potteries Installation." *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. IX, No. 3 (March 1936) pp.5-10.

²⁶"Medicine Hat Potteries," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XX, No. 8 (August 1947) pp.10-11.

²⁷G. Yackulic, *op. cit.*, p.27.

THE QUEST FOR EFFICIENCY

As manufacturing plants, Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries were both dedicated to making pottery. The raw materials used by each one were identical, the manufacturing processes were similar, and the finished products were comparable. Yet the two companies clearly approached their business from very different perspectives.

In the late 1930s, Medalta's head office in Calgary began focusing on time and production reports. Workmen had to account for each day's labour in half-hour time slots, indicating their productivity by itemizing the materials they used, the tasks they completed, and the number of pieces they made. Head office used this data for compiling costs.²⁸ Detailed information was also obtained from Baumler. He was asked to provide a breakdown of methods and costs for specific orders such as, for example, an advertique ashtray for Martin Paper Products in Winnipeg:

To make model	24 hours / \$0.40 per hour
To make first mould and pattern	8 hours at \$0.40 per hour
Plaster used in model and pattern	35 lbs.
Cost of 1 mould	\$0.11 + 10 lbs. plaster

Additional costs for clay, jigging, glazing, and stamping were all worked out separately for orders selected by head office.

Ed Phillipson moved beyond the cost analysis to an assessment of the factory's operations. Although Arthur Cumming kept a tight hold on the company purse strings, Phillipson introduced new methods at every possible opportunity. As an engineer, he was fascinated by the mechanics of production. He had examined the system of assembly-line production at the Ford Motor Company and completed a course in time and motion studies with Stevenson & Kellogg.²⁹ At Medalta, he turned his attention to increasing the plant's efficiency.

Phillipson focused on mechanizing any element of human labour he could. He introduced an assembly-line system for ceramic production. Large conveyor belts were built through the factory, replacing the "runners" who had previously carried the wares from one work station to the next. The skilled work of jigging was automated, reducing Medalta's dependence on highly-paid jiggers. With an automatic jigging machine, unskilled labourers were capable of performing this work at a considerable savings in

²⁸F.D. Waines, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary to K. Baumler, Plant Superintendent, October 5, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

²⁹Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (August 13, 1992).

wages to the company.³⁰ Eliminating skilled work reduced the cost of production, and using machines in place of labour reduced the potential for error.

One of Phillipson's labour-saving devices was a machine for making cups. Attaching handles to cups and teapots had always been a task reserved for the "small and quick hands" of female employees.³¹ Handles, formed separately from the cups, were manually attached with a small amount of slip. The problem was that the cup and its handle could shrink at different rates as they dried, causing stress and breakage at the join. Bacteria could lodge in these cracks, making the cups unfit for commercial food service. In 1946, Phillipson developed a machine which he later patented, designed to form a "Sanitas" cup and handle from a single piece of clay.³² The new product was marketed as superior to regular cups in terms of health, strength and appearance: "a truly Sanitas handle – strong – neat – smooth – sanitary."³³

Phillipson's assessment of Medalta's manufacturing operations took him into the art department as well. While he admired Tom Hulme and respected his accomplishments, he was concerned that decorated ware took too much time to make. However, he could not easily alter the decorating processes without materially affecting the finished products. Phillipson essentially resigned himself to the fact that the art department was not a money-making venture: it was there simply to accommodate customers.³⁴ In spite of this, he did introduce one mechanized decorating technique which provided a simple but attractive finish for Medalta's hotel china: 'banding,' a process that involved applying a stripe of coloured glaze around the wares' circumference.

The decorators who applied 'banding' to the dishes used a wide or, more usually, a narrow brush to apply a strip of accent colour to plain wares. Cups and soup bowls to be finished in this way were spun on a small lathe at the decorator's work station. The decorator supported her elbow on a plank set into the work table as a steady rest, and positioned her brush so that it rested evenly against the vessel as it rotated on the lathe. Flatware (plates and saucers) was done at a different work station with a horizontal rotating wheel like a traditional potter's wheel. Oval dishes could not rotate evenly and so had to be done freehand.

Medicine Hat Potteries took a slightly different approach to modernization, in part because Hop Yuill was more prepared to spend money on new technology. The pottery was built in 1937-38 as a model plant with the latest equipment. As technical advances

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ W. Armstrong to the Board of Industrial Relations, Edmonton, February 8, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014).

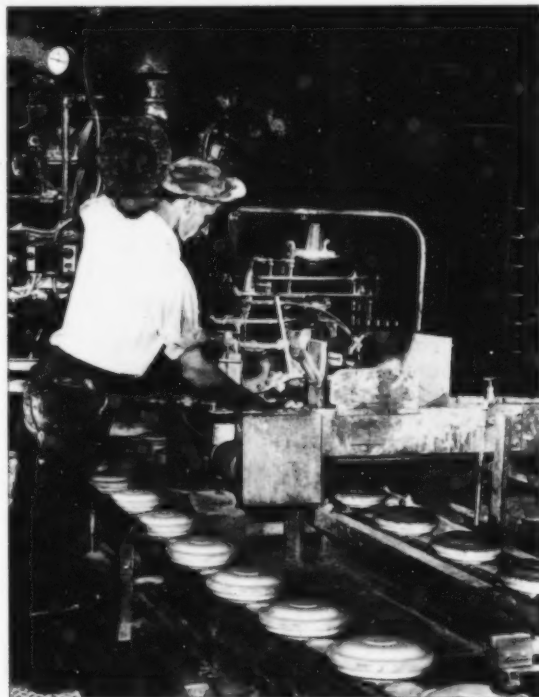
³² "Canadian Patent No. 498107 dated December 1, 1953 and US Patent No. 2691806, covering a Method and Apparatus for Forming Pottery Cup Handles," *Medicine Hat News*, November 16, 1959.

³³ *Catalogue of Vitrified Hotel & Restaurant China, Ovenware and Stoneware by Medalta* (c. 1947) p. 2.

³⁴ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (August 13, 1992).

continued in the ceramics field, Yuill re-invested in the plant to keep its production methods current. For example, one of the company's major acquisitions was a 'Miller' Automatic Jigger Machine, acquired around 1947.³⁵ This was an elaborate piece of equipment which single-handedly transformed soft clay into finished wares ready for glazing and firing.³⁶ The machine was regarded as a mechanical wonder which offered manufacturers two big advantages: production speed, and labour reduction.

The production speed of the Automatic Jigger Machine ranged from 75 to 120 dozen pieces per hour, depending on the type and size of ware it was set up to produce. Where a jiggerman could make 191 saucers or 325 cups in an hour, the machine could turn out over 1,400 of either.³⁷ However, the machine's principal advantage, according to its manufacturers, was its ability to reduce labour costs. The jiggering process normally required three people: a mould runner, a batter-out, and a jiggerman. The automatic



Medicine Hat Potteries purchased a fully automated jigger machine, shown here with its operator. (Miller Automatic Jigger Machine: P328.241, MHM&AG.)

³⁵"Medicine Hat Potteries," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XX, No. 8 (August 1947) p. 12.

³⁶G. Yackulic, *op. cit.*, p.27.

³⁷"Cost and Profit on Semi Automatic, One Operator and Two Mould Runners," Medicine Hat Potteries, October 7, 1944.

jigger needed only one operator, whose sole task was to feed prepared clay in at one end of the machine. The entire process from that point was fully automated: clay was automatically measured, cut, and placed on a mould, which was then batted out and shaped with a template, and finally transferred to the drier by conveyor belt. The manufacturers considered the machine's labour-saving capabilities such an advantage that they actually charged a royalty based on the number of people which the machine replaced:

As soon as [the] machine is placed in commercial production you pay us a royalty of 25 per cent of the... cost for jiggerman, batter out and mold [sic] runner.³⁸

Before purchasing its Miller machine, Medicine Hat Potteries worked out the relative cost and profit of manufacturing pottery on the automated system. Included in the analysis were the costs, not only for one operator but for two mould runners as well, in addition to the royalty. Even with these extra considerations, the company figured a minimum annual savings of \$2,600 on cups and \$7,716.80 on saucers.³⁹

Increased production and reduced costs were part of Medicine Hat Potteries' approach to efficiency. However, modern management methods were considered just as important as modern equipment. A handbook on company policies outlined the importance of treating employees well, and providing leadership and encouragement on the job.

A successful foreman must be a capable personnel officer under today's system of industrial life. He must consider humanics as important as mechanics. He may know how the job is to be done with the most efficient men at the lowest cost, but if he is not a leader of men... we may soon find that he is causing an industrial relations situation that will involve the company in severe labor troubles.⁴⁰

In addition to maintaining high efficiency standards, promoting economy and enforcing safety regulations, the foreman was instructed to build morale and be a good listener. Above all, the foreman was to be "a leader, not a boss or a driver."⁴¹ The foreman's leadership meant he was responsible not only to the workers under him, but also to allied supervisors. Foremen were instructed to cooperate with one another in an

³⁸Brochure on the "Miller Automatic Single Jigger," Miller Pottery Engineering Company, Swissvale Pennsylvania; received by Medicine Hat Potteries September 30, 1944 (CPIC, Medicine Hat Pottery Papers).

³⁹"Cost and Profit on Semi Automatic, One Operator and Two Mould Runners," Medicine Hat Potteries, October 7, 1944.

⁴⁰Foreman's Handbook, Medicine Hat Potteries, 1945 (MHM&AG, uncatalogued).

⁴¹*Ibid.*

analogy which compared harmony in a "top-flight organization" to the structural support of a brick wall:

It is a well-known fact that we must have lateral support in order to progress. Look at a brick wall. One brick alongside another is tied in as well as receiving support from the bottom and the top. That is how a good structure is always engineered.⁴²

The handbook was filled with a combination of organizational principles and folksy wisdom. There was also a foundation of employee benefits, like group insurance for men who had worked with the company for more than one year, and available leaves of absence for employees of more than two years' seniority. Whether these policies actually made a difference to the company's productivity is impossible to assess. Perhaps the only indicator is suggested by the labour disputes which consumed the pottery industry in Medicine Hat in 1947. The strike at Medalta Potteries, which saw labour and management firmly entrenched in opposing camps, lasted for 72 days, making it the longest in the city's history. The strike at Medicine Hat Potteries ended after only two days.

The emphasis on efficiency which started in the 1930s continued to build momentum to the 1950s, with its time-and-motion studies and incentive production methods.⁴³ But before pursuing this topic further, we will turn to the strategies used by the potteries for developing new wares.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³See Chapter 10, "Struggling for Survival."

CHAPTER 7

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS

Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries faced daunting competition in the Canadian market. Efficient manufacturing methods alone could not carry the companies: they needed to produce pottery that their clients wanted to buy. Shifts in customer demand could make or break a product line, with significant consequences for the manufacturer's finances. Supplying the market was a demanding task which required versatility and quick response time.

Both Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries had to develop reflexes for dealing with market changes. However, more is known about Medalta for three reasons. First, Medalta had a longer production history lasting a total of 38 years. Its innovation and diversification are more obvious over this lengthy time span. Secondly, Medalta's corporate records are more extensive. Detailed correspondence between the company and its suppliers and distributors gives information about how and when different wares were developed or discontinued. Finally, Medalta used over 100 different identifying stamps on its wares. These stamps reveal information about specific product lines, marketing strategies and materials as well as providing clues to the company's production chronology.¹ Medicine Hat Potteries used only one stamp throughout its history, the "Little Chief," treating it as a manufacturer's mark and a company logo.

Medalta Potteries went through quite an evolution in its efforts to supply the Canadian market. Its initial stoneware lines were utilitarian items for household and commercial use. Their success created a solid base for the company, and led to Pratt's attempt to diversify into whiteware production. While his idea was timely, and a large market was available for the dishes he had planned to manufacture, the company failed to raise the capital it needed to expand into these new lines. Instead, under Bill Wyatt's direction, the lines of stoneware products were broadened. When stoneware sales started to decline in the late 1920s, Medalta began developing decorative pieces. Karl Baumler and Tom Hulme concentrated on developing shapes, styles, glazes and decorations for the new artware lines. In 1937, Ed Phillipson began looking for a new staple product for the company, and started making dishes. After an unsuccessful effort to make dinnerware, he introduced hotel china. The sturdy new tableware in standardized shapes and patterns was designed for high-volume production, and became a big seller through the 1940s.

¹Stamps include information like product names ("Medalta Beater Jar" or "Ice Water"), marketing strategies ("Made In Canada"), and materials ("Vitrified Ware"). Research on chronological ordering of Medalta's stamps was first undertaken by Richard and Jean Symonds in their 1974 publication, *Medalta Stoneware and Pottery for Collectors*. Ronald Getty pursued this topic in more detail, initially with Esther Klaimann in "Identifying Medalta, 1916-1954: A Guide to Markings" (*Material History Bulletin* 12, Spring 1981) and subsequently in his publication *Know Your Medalta: Stamps and Other Markings - A Guide to Dating Products* (Medicine Hat: IMC Press, 1995).

The product lines manufactured by Medicine Hat Potteries did not go through the same evolutionary development that Medalta's did. The company started out making a wide variety of wares, with over one thousand items under production.² These ranged from the staple commodities of stoneware crocks, bean pots and other household wares, to artware items including lamps, planters, ornaments, vases and ashtrays. Sets of dishes in bright colours and patterns became a company trademark. The only major change in production occurred in 1943, when the factory began producing plain white dishes in accordance with government regulations. The regular lines of coloured ware were not resumed until after 1947.³

MEDALTA'S ARTWARE

Medalta Potteries had a longer history than Medicine Hat Potteries. It had already been in operation for 21 years when the Yuills decided to branch out into pottery production. As a result, Medalta's development was affected by economic influences which pre-dated Medicine Hat Potteries, most notably the decline of the stoneware market in the late 1920s, and the worst years of the Depression in the early 1930s. Medalta's response to these two market catastrophes was to diversify its product lines. In 1929, the company began producing artware.

Medalta's art department was set up under Thomas Hulme, who had trained as an artist and decorator in England. The market for utilitarian stoneware was dwindling in 1929 and, prompted by Albert Pratt in Toronto, Medalta began to pay more attention to decorative finishes for its products. Bill Wyatt hired Hulme to design patterns and decorations which would change the look of Medalta's wares. When Walter Armstrong hired Karl Baumler in 1930, the focus on artware was intensified. Baumler worked on new glaze colours and finishes, and expanded the range of vases, lamp bases, jardinières and other decorative items manufactured by the plant. Armstrong himself, although he was not involved in pottery production, contacted various potteries and suppliers to get information on new methods of decoration.

Hulme was the chief architect of the art department. It was his exclusive responsibility to design the stencils and stamps used by the art department staff.⁴ He had a small office in the decorating room, where he worked at his drafting table. The walls of his office were lined with shelves which held pots of paint, powdered pigment, turpentine and linseed oil. He worked from traditional glaze 'recipes' and also developed his own combinations

²*Lethbridge Herald*, April 19, 1940.

³"Medicine Hat Potteries," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XX, No. 8 (August 1947) p.11.

⁴The following section draws on information presented in A. Hayward, "Medalta's Art Department: A Strategy for Product Diversification" (*Material History Review* 39, Spring 1994, pp.18-19).

of glaze compounds.⁵ His staff of "decorators" was made up entirely of women. The tasks they performed all involved working with clay which had already been shaped and hardened. Leather-hard moulded wares were brought to the art department, and there the decorators worked on finishing the surfaces.

Three principal techniques were used to decorate Medalta's artwares: transfer decals, stencils, and rubber stamping. Transfer decals provided a simple method of decoration which required no artistic ability whatsoever. The decals consisted of patterns or pictures mounted on a soluble paper backing. Before the decals were applied to the pottery, the ware was coated with a thin layer of decal varnish to prepare the surface. The decal was then bossed, or rubbed, until it began to adhere to the varnish. Finally, it was soaked in water until the paper came off completely and the transfer was firmly attached. Initially transfers were purchased from Blythe Colour Works, an English company, although Medalta later bought a machine that allowed them to print their own.⁶

Stencils involved more time and effort to produce, as they were made in-house. Hulme designed all the stencils which were then cut from lead foil. For patterns requiring



Stencilled decorations provided a simple and versatile finish for Medalta's artwares. (Artware displays: M5827, Glenbow Archives.)

⁵Interview with Rose Stickle and Engeline Kessler (decorators from Medalta's art department), Medicine Hat, August 12, 1992.

⁶Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat, August 13, 1992.

several colours, a separate stencil had to be cut for each colour application. When he distributed stencils to the decorating staff, he also assigned the glaze colours to be used with them. The decorators used spray canisters with adjustable nozzles to apply the pattern.

Rubber stamps were the most common method used for decorating. Stamps, a cheap substitute for transfer printing, allowed fairly consistent repetition of patterns. Most of Medalta's stamps had small and simple motifs, although more complex designs were made for special orders. Stamps were charged with glaze and then pressed against the pottery surface. Complex patterns required more production steps, such as combining multiple stamps, or filling in the stamped outline with coloured glazes. These were treated as specialty items, made only on request for clients who could absorb the increased cost of manufacture. Numerous orders of this kind were taken on by the company for clients including, to name only a few, the Ranchmen's Club in Calgary, the University of Alberta, and the Prince of Wales Hotel.

Decals, stencils, and stamps were the most common methods used by the art department staff, but other decorative techniques were also used. Moulds were used to create embossed surface motifs or patterns, and in some cases the clay was incised to 'draw' a pattern or to augment an embossed design. A number of designs were painted directly onto the wares with glazes or lacquers. This was a more costly technique, as Hulme did the painting himself.⁷ Initially, this was a larger part of his responsibilities, and consequently most of the painted vases, lamp bases, and wall plaques date from the early 1930s.

As the number of people working in the art department grew over the years, increasingly Hulme's job changed from finishing artware pieces himself to supervising staff who carried out his designs. He prepared samples, using painting techniques to produce a pattern that would subsequently be carried out by his staff with mechanized techniques. With the increasing popularity of Medalta's artwares, the art department became busier and Hulme needed assistance. In 1938 Miss Cooper, a local talent, was asked to prepare models of a polar bear, wild cat and mountain lion for the factory's use.⁸ Ernie Hehr, who initially worked in the glazing department, became foreman of the art department in the mid-1940s. He supervised the decorating staff so that Hulme had

⁷Confirmed in interviews with Shirley Albrecht (Hulme's daughter) and with Rose Stickle and Engeline Kessler (decorating staff from Medalta's art department; interviews in Medicine Hat on July 30 and August 12, 1992). The only painting for which the department's decorating staff were responsible was any application of in-fill colour required to complete pattern.

⁸It is not clear whether these were actually used for artware production. Payment of \$5 per model was reluctantly offered, and there is no record of Miss Cooper's response. However, it seems that the models were refused for a display hosted by the local Technical School, so perhaps their quality was questionable. (F.D. Waines to Plant Superintendent, May 20, 1938; Medicine Hat to Calgary, May 23, 1938 [PAA 69.235/376].)

more time for his work.⁹ An assistant designer was hired in 1947. Miss Mary Satterly, a graduate of the New York State College of Ceramics in Alfred, New York worked briefly with Hulme in 1948 before taking a position in the Ceramics Engineering program at the University of Toronto.¹⁰

Artware had the greatest popular appeal of Medalta's wares because of the craftsmanship expressed in the wares. One customer wrote a personal letter to Hulme after receiving a commemorative plate he had ordered: "Minute examination of the plate shows the meticulous care you used in making up the design, which far exceeded the expectation we had in mind."¹¹ While this was most apparent in the custom designs which Hulme developed, it contributed to the popularity of all the decorated wares and is still evident amongst contemporary collectors of Medalta wares.

Artware was popular with Medalta's customers, but it required a great deal of handwork. From a management perspective, artware production was the most time-consuming and labour-intensive process in the factory. While customers maintained a steady demand for decorated ware, it was an expensive line for Medalta to produce. Artware orders tied up the kilns, and held up shipments of other orders if the rail cars had to be delayed waiting for them to be completed.¹² Plates, for example, were manufactured at the rate of several hundred every hour, yet their decoration took considerably longer. One specialty order was placed for 134 plates to be decorated with a scenic church pattern: the order took Hulme and three assistants a total of 35 hours and 5 minutes to complete.¹³ Virtually an entire work week was spent finishing plates which had taken less than an hour to manufacture. A severe letter was sent to Medalta's head office in Calgary in an effort to limit any further requests for this pattern:

We would like to impress upon you, that this church decoration is not only a slow and expensive procedure but it takes a good day to cut the stencil for same. If we are to apply this decoration on anything that gets into a traveller's head, we will have to keep two men doing nothing but cutting stencils... Such specialty orders are holding us up to a great extent."¹⁴

Artwares were not designed to appeal to a wealthy clientele, meaning that production costs could not be excessive. Increasingly, the methods for decorating were streamlined, and costs for applying patterns were worked out in advance. Numbers were assigned

⁹Interview with Engeline Kessler and Rose Stickle (former art department staff members), Medicine Hat, August 12, 1992.

¹⁰*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXI No. 1 (January 1948) p.29.

¹¹N.R. Ray to T. Hulme Esq., November 18, 1953; collection of Shirley Albrecht.

¹²Medicine Hat to Mr. J.M. Perry, sales agent, March 9, 1940 (PAA 69.235/408).

¹³Glaze Department Form, May 18, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

¹⁴Medicine Hat to Calgary, May 14, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

to styles and colours so that tools and work procedures could be organized efficiently. Baumler advised head office that clients should be requested to order decorations and colours by number to ensure accuracy.¹⁵ However, the Calgary staff did not use this system consistently. Phillipson repeated the request in more detail to head office in 1938: "Concerning the Artware Room, you must realize that we have got hundreds of varieties and quite often you do not state definite colors and designs."¹⁶ Unless plant staff were to use their own judgment in making these selections on behalf of the clients, specific instructions had to be obtained with the orders.

The items made in the art department changed over the first decade of production. At first, Hulme concentrated on developing decorations, and used existing wares as the basis for his patterns: teapots and pitchers were decorated with windmills, owls and fruit. Some new shapes and styles of wares were developed by Bill Wyatt – vases, bowls, jardinieres, and lamps – with a wider range of decorative images.¹⁷ Hulme had trained as an artist, not a potter, and he lacked familiarity with clays and glazes. As a result, most of the early pieces are hand-decorated, and many of them are finished with lacquers. This heavy, shiny paint produced a brightly coloured finish; however, because it was not fired it lacked durability.

Jardinieres, planters, bulb bowls and figurines were among the other artwares produced by Medalta. The two most popular lines were vases and lamp bases. Vases were one of the earliest products in the artware line. From the simple hourglass-shaped florists' vase produced in the 1920s, Medalta expanded to 85 different styles available in various sizes.¹⁸ The only problem with the vases appeared to be that they leaked. Albert Pratt, Medalta's Toronto distributor, told Armstrong as a result:

We have not been pushing artware as we would have done had there been no complaints afterwards. You can hardly blame us for lying low until you have something which is perfect.¹⁹

After receiving these complaints, Armstrong saw that the clay mixture was adjusted and the firing temperature raised, guaranteeing the new wares to be "absolutely waterproof."²⁰

Lamp bases emerged as one of Medalta's strongest lines. Between 1930 and 1935, the company introduced at least 36 new styles.²¹ Armstrong tried to encourage economy in designing the lamp bases by emphasizing colour rather than pattern. He used 24 different

¹⁵K. Baumler, Plant Superintendent to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary September 30, 1937 (PAA 69.235/365).

¹⁶Medicine Hat to Calgary, March 25, 1938 (PAA 69.235/374).

¹⁷Inventory form, "Details of Ware in Art Room, December 31st, 1930" (PAA 69.235/493).

¹⁸Ron Getty, *Know Your Medalta Vases* (Medicine Hat: IMC Press, 1995) p.12.

¹⁹A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., January 18, 1935 (PAA 69.235/346)

²⁰Medalta Potteries Ltd. to A.W. Pratt, Toronto, January 14, 1935 (PAA 69.235/346)

²¹Summarized from Appendix B in B.G. Douglas' *Medalta Lamps of Vancouver* (Author: 1995).

colours for the new lamp bases produced for 1935, and pointed out to Albert Pratt: "We have gone into a more expensive line, as you will note, and some of our colours are of the very finest."²² His approach proved popular: Armstrong reported a "run" on lamp bases at the end of 1935, and had to keep extra staff on to meet the demand.²³ The total number of lamps sold in that year was over 40,000 for a value exceeding \$17,000.²⁴

While Medalta's artwares were popular, their production was time-consuming and labour-intensive. They gave the company a means of hanging on through the Depression years, but something more profitable was needed if the pottery was to flourish. This concern became pressing in 1937, when Medalta for the first time faced serious local competition from Medicine Hat Potteries.

HOTEL CHINA

When Ed Phillipson joined Medalta late in 1937, he was fresh out of academics. He had studied ceramic engineering at the University of Saskatchewan under Professor Wolsey Worcester. Medalta was in a state of crisis in December of 1937. The company's key staff – including the general manager, plant superintendent, and many experienced workers – had just begun their exodus to the newly-established Medicine Hat Potteries. Phillipson was hired to get Medalta running again. He needed to develop new wares, hire staff, and equip the plant for production.

The company's finances were still in rough shape in the 1930s, suffering from the impact of the Depression. Despite Armstrong's efforts to market artware, pottery sales had dropped steadily from 1934. Yet some funds were required if Phillipson was to resuscitate the company's operations. Early in 1938, Medalta's capital was reduced, the deficit written off, and a working capital of \$35,000 given to the company through a reorganization adopted by the shareholders.²⁵ With this, Phillipson set to work. He needed to hire new staff so that he could get the plant's production up to speed. Then, his first priority was to develop new products. All of the company's secrets had just emigrated to 'the opposition,' so new wares were required if Medalta was to retain a competitive edge.

In January, 1938 Phillipson placed an advertisement in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* for a kiln burner thoroughly experienced with firing stoneware, flower pots and artware in down-draft kilns. He promised "a steady job and good pay for the right man."²⁶ It is perhaps a measure of the company's desperate need for staff that this

²²W. Armstrong to the Medicine Hat Pottery Co., Toronto, January 8, 1935 (PAA 69.235/337).

²³W. Armstrong, Manager, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat to R.G. Smith, Secretary, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, December 31, 1935 (PAA 69.235/352).

²⁴PAA 69.235/364.

²⁵*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XI, No. 5 (May 1938) p.1.

²⁶*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (January 1938) p.11.

position was advertised in a national trade journal. It also indicates the urgent need to get under production again. The company could not afford to train someone on the job: Phillipson's time was at a premium, and the plant was understaffed.

Even before the staffing situation was resolved, Phillipson began devoting his attention to Medalta's product lines. Under Armstrong's management, Medalta had expanded from its existing stoneware lines into artware production. Phillipson wanted to move in a new direction. While he admired Tom Hulme's ability, Phillipson was convinced the company could not hope to make artware its financial backbone. Artware was simply not a money-making venture because it required too much handwork.²⁷ Likewise, while stoneware crockery was considered a staple of the industry, Phillipson was concerned that customer demand for these wares was primarily seasonal.²⁸ He wanted to see the company move into lines which could be mass-produced and appeal to a broadly-based, year-round market. His suggestion was that Medalta make dishes.

Phillipson's first efforts were directed at updating the look of Medalta's stoneware lines by giving them a clean, white finish. He began working on a white matt glaze in December 1937, but by mid-January admitted that the tests to date were "not promising."²⁹ As a student, Phillipson had completed extensive research on *engobes*, liquid mixtures of clay and colouring agents which were used to create a smooth, coloured coat over pottery wares. With his previous work in mind, he recommended using a white slip covered with a transparent matt glaze to create the desired effect.³⁰ The result was a new line of fireproof ovenwares: white-lined casseroles, pie plates and roasting pans.³¹

The next endeavour was to produce dinnerware. Successful lines of colourful dinnerware had been developed in the mid-1930s by major American potteries like Red Wing in Minnesota and Homer Laughlin in West Virginia.³² Phillipson decided to follow suit in 1938. However, he first had to surmount one major problem: he needed suitable clay. Dishes required a fine, light-coloured clay which finished to a smooth surface. Phillipson blended two of the clays which came to the plant from Eastend: a sandy, stoneware clay and a "fat" clay, yellowish and very sticky which combined to produce a beautiful, smooth mixture. The only drawback was that it did not clean well. The only way to make it look presentable was to give it an opaque covering.³³ Phillipson experimented with a range of deeply coloured glazes. The dark, rich colours were required

²⁷ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (August 13, 1992).

²⁸ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat, (December 4, 1994).

²⁹ E.G. Phillipson to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary January 12, 1938 (PAA 69.235/372).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ The new white lining was "thoroughly tested" by "putting the dish in snow while it was real hot" Medicine Hat to Calgary, February 2, 1938 (PAA 69.235/382).

³² Susan Strong, *A History of American Ceramics: An Annotated Bibliography* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1983) *passim*.

³³ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (December 4, 1994).

to cover the yellow clay, which tended to show through if good coverage was not obtained with the glaze. Phillipson prepared a series of samples for review by Medalta's head office in April 1938. The response was subdued, but positive:

It seems to us that six satisfactory colors would be the light blue, dark blue, yellow, green, deep red and the coral red, for the dinnerware set, providing of course these colours can be obtained on a yellow body.³⁴

Unfortunately, the yellow clay proved more of an obstacle than Phillipson anticipated. Not only was it difficult to control the final colour of the dishes, but the wares were thick and heavy-looking. He needed something lighter, thinner and more attractive.

Early in 1938, Phillipson began experimenting with clays from Medalta's deposits in Willows, Saskatchewan. The superior qualities of clays from this area had been well-documented by Professor W.G. Worcester, Phillipson's mentor at the University of Saskatchewan. Worcester had studied the clay resources of Western Canada extensively, with particular emphasis on Saskatchewan deposits. In 1928, he described the ball clays of southern Saskatchewan as a "semi-china" type, burning to a white or light cream. He noted they were already in use in Eastern Canada for whiteware manufacture, and in Medicine Hat for pottery.³⁵ A year later, he published a definitive study of these clays, deeming them to be of "Dominion importance" for the clay products industry.³⁶

Phillipson decided to try using the ball clays to make 'hotel china,' an industry term for the solid, durable tableware required by hotels and restaurants to withstand extremely heavy use. He prepared a clay mixture and enhanced it with cobalt to achieve a pure white body. He sent the lab prototype – a small green teapot with a white interior – to Ben Cunliffe, Medalta's Vancouver distributor. Cunliffe was sufficiently impressed that he approached the hotel and restaurant trade in Vancouver. But Phillipson was not yet ready for production: he had trouble even producing samples on schedule. In the end, Cunliffe had to turn down orders from hotel supply houses because Medalta missed the seasonal deadlines: the samples Cunliffe requested in January were still not delivered by June.³⁷

Phillipson had his hands full. He needed to equip the plant for producing the new wares before he could make the samples – let alone fill the orders – for Medalta's distributors. He approached Cumming to authorize the expenses, and then set to work. He gave equipment designs to Simon Scott, a welder and machinist in Medicine Hat,

³⁴F.D. Wainess to Plant Superintendent, April 19, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

³⁵Vol. II, No. 7 (July 1928), p. 1.

³⁶"An Investigation of Twenty-One Saskatchewan Ball Clays," *Journal of the American Ceramic Society* (May 1929); "Saskatchewan Ball Clays of Dominion Importance," *Bulletin of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy* (May 1929).

³⁷B.A. Cunliffe, Columbia-Orient Export & Import Co. Ltd., Vancouver to F.D. Wainess, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, June 1, 1938 (PAA 69.235/382).

and also contacted a machine shop in Calgary.³⁸ But Phillipson was hampered by Cumming's sense of economy. As he rushed to meet an order for 144 baby plates for Cunliffe, Phillipson reported to head office:

We are being held up at times, due to the fact that we are picking up pieces and sticking them together as best we can in order to [keep] expenses as low as possible.³⁹

By mid-summer of 1938, Phillipson was able to turn out samples at a more regular pace. Cunliffe's enthusiasm for the new wares grew accordingly. Unfortunately, his eagerness translated into ambitious sales pitches that were hard for Phillipson to meet. Testing and experimentation continued, but it was difficult to keep pace with Cunliffe's inventive ideas. In July, Phillipson complained in exasperation to head office:

When we first started to make this tea-pot of semi-porcelain, it was to be made in dark green only. Now we have orders for every colour imaginable, including Tomato Red, which burns at a temperature less than our flower pot kiln... This will of course require experimental work, which will slow up the production of same.⁴⁰

The reply from Calgary, tinged with a rare sympathy, suggested he explain these difficulties to Mr. Cunliffe and ask him "not to use his imagination to such a large extent in taking orders for coloured glazed ware."⁴¹

Despite Cunliffe's enthusiasm, Medalta's hotel china was not yet perfected. Phillipson continued his trials into the early fall, but still even the best samples were accompanied by excuses. When F.D. Waines at Medalta's head office requested several pieces for Cassidy's Ltd., the company's Montreal agent, he instructed Phillipson:

Pick out the best samples you have as we will have to do some explaining in regard to the final quality of this type of merchandise. We will have to point out that at present this type of ware is more or less in the experimental stage.⁴²

Despite Waines' concerns, the response was very favourable. Cassidy's indicated that if Medalta was able to perfect its hotel china, they would like to act as the company's sole agents for Eastern Canada.⁴³

³⁸Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (December 4, 1994).

³⁹Medicine Hat to Calgary, May 28, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁴⁰Medicine Hat to Calgary, July 25, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁴¹F.D. Waines to Medicine Hat, July 26, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁴²F.D. Waines to E.G. Phillipson, September 22, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁴³Cassidy's Ltd., Montreal to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary October 13, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

By October, Phillipson felt confident in notifying head office that he could manufacture hotel china ware in quantities.⁴⁴ Arthur Cumming was excited when he saw the latest samples. He announced somewhat breathlessly: "Montreal is all hopped up over it, and so is Vancouver, and we believe that we can go places with this."⁴⁵ The sales potential for the new wares was tremendous. For the first time, Medalta was going to surpass the marketability of its staple stoneware lines. "If we can get it going," Cumming exclaimed, "we can make more money out of it than we can selling crocks."⁴⁶

Orders began coming in. Both Canadian Pacific and Canadian National wanted custom table service in an exotic range of shapes and sizes. Phillipson turned from his work on the clay mixture to the development of specialized dishes: ramekins, cocottes, au gratins, gravy boats, shirred egg and rarebit dishes along with the regular plates, bowls, and jugs.

The year 1939 was a busy one for Medalta.⁴⁷ In addition to the hotel china, the company introduced "Fiesta Ware," a series of brightly coloured dishes copied from the original manufacturer, Homer Laughlin China Company of Newell, West Virginia. The brilliant yellows and oranges were produced by adding radioactive salts to the glazes.⁴⁸ New novelty lines were introduced, and considerable improvement was made in the finish of their stoneware lines. New colours and decorations were developed as well, which improved Medalta's artwares.

MEDALTA'S MARKETING STRATEGIES

As Medalta gradually expanded its product lines, clients and distributors had to be kept advised of the company's new wares. For the most part, Medalta relied on its distributors for arranging sales. The company's principal representatives were the Columbia-Orient Import and Export Company in Vancouver; James B. Carter Ltd. in Winnipeg; Harry Tuckwell in Fort William, Ontario; the Medicine Hat Pottery Company in Toronto; James McQuillam in Montreal; and N. Hutchinson in St. John.

Medalta also did some marketing on its own. The company maintained a showroom in the Lancaster Building in Calgary where its latest wares were displayed.⁴⁹ J.J. Gibbons Ltd. Advertising, also located in the Lancaster Building, provided agency services for Medalta

⁴⁴E.G. Phillipson to Calgary, October 4, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁴⁵A.D. Cumming, President and Managing Director, Medalta Potteries Ltd. to Medalta Potteries Ltd., November 12, 1938 (PAA 69.235/382).

⁴⁶A.D. Cumming to Medicine Hat, November 2, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁴⁷The company's new lines were described in a feature article in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XII, No. 1 (January 1939) pp.6-7.

⁴⁸J.D. Leitch, Eldorado Radium Corporation, New York to Prof. W.G. Worcester, University of Saskatchewan, June 19, 1939 (UofS Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

⁴⁹K. Baumler to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary October 14, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

Potteries Ltd.⁵⁰ Medalta was routinely listed in trade journals and directories, with separate illustrated entries for its stoneware lines and artware products. Advertisements were regularly placed in local newspapers. Even in 1935, when company funds were tight, Medalta ran advertisements in the *Canada Poultryman* published in Vancouver, *Keith's Florist Directory*, *The Nabob Magazine* published by Kelly Douglas Co. Ltd. Wholesale Grocers in Vancouver; and *The Maritime Merchant*.⁵¹ Medalta also issued several catalogues and illustrated price lists during its history. The last one was issued about 1947.

At the suggestion of Albert Pratt, Medalta's Toronto distributor, the company began exhibiting at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in 1934. Medalta displayed its wares in the Manufacturers' Building until 1939.⁵² Pratt was an enthusiastic supporter of the displays, as he commented to Walter Armstrong:

My opinion is that there is not another stand at the Exhibition where as much interest was shown. People would scarcely believe that the goods were 'Made in Canada'.⁵³

In fact, Medalta's distributors and clients advised the company to mark all its items, "Made in Canada." Many customers at the retail level were convinced the wares were made in Japan. "People do not believe that the product you are now making is Canadian," Ben Cunliffe advised Armstrong in 1938.⁵⁴ He suggested that cheap articles like machine-made bowls could go unmarked, but that the decorated ware and Phillipson's new white-lined dishes should be stamped to show they were 'Made in Canada'.⁵⁵

PRODUCTION PROBLEMS AND CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS —♦

Medalta successfully developed a range of new wares in the 1920s and 1930s. Product development became an important survival tool for the company, as it endured economic

⁵⁰ *Fraser's Canadian Trade Directory*, 1935 (PAA 69.235/359).

⁵¹ Correspondence re: advertising, 1935 (PAA 69.235/359).

⁵² Interestingly, Medalta did not display its wares in the Applied Arts section of the Art Building where other potters and pottery companies exhibited (e.g., the Deichmanns of New Brunswick, or the English porcelain and pottery companies of Royal Doulton, Royal Worcester and Spode). Unfortunately for posterity, Medalta stopped exhibiting the year before the CNE introduced its "Canadian Home Beautiful" display which featured the latest in home furnishings and interior decoration, and was thoroughly documented in photographs.

⁵³ A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., January 18, 1935 (PAA 69.235/346).

⁵⁴ B.W. Cunliffe, Manager, Brown & Hargrave Ltd., Toronto to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, June 27, 1938 (PAA 69.235/382).

⁵⁵ E.D. Waines to Medicine Hat, July 4, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

shifts and changes in customer preferences. After 1937, however, product development became something of a battle between Arthur Cumming and Ed Phillipson. Phillipson wanted to approach production scientifically. He wore his white lab coat like a badge at the plant, and devoted his attention to experimenting with clay mixtures and glaze compounds. He was determined that new wares, even if they were just variations on the style of a plate, had to be prepared first as samples and tested for warpage, sagging and size. Only when the tests were complete was he prepared to proceed with making a pattern block and multiple moulds.⁵⁶

The pace of Phillipson's process did not suit Cumming. For him, the tests represented delays in getting wares to market. He also did not appreciate his plant manager using valuable time and resources to develop experimental designs. When Phillipson started working up a prototype for beer steins, for example, Cumming wrote to him in exasperation:

We have no orders for beer steins, we cannot compete against the Japanese in these, and I cannot understand why we would use Hollingshead's time and 100 pounds of plaster to make one.⁵⁷

From Phillipson's perspective, this preparatory work was essential. However, working in a production plant was quite different from experimenting in a classroom lab, and he was forced to adjust to meet his employer's expectations. He did not have time to develop samples and tests for wares which customers had already ordered.

The chief difficulty is, that we have put out so many new items, and have never had a chance to perform tests to insure perfection. Quite often new samples turn out to be perfect and yet, when we make them in larger quantities some adjustments are necessary, which we do not get a chance to make, as orders for same are already waiting. It is not easy to turn out a white-lined bowl when clay, room, saggars, dust storms etc. are all against you.⁵⁸

Perhaps as a result of the company's rushed approach to product development, Medalta's wares were chronically defective. While they produced some very popular wares, the company faced continual complaints from customers and distributors about the quality of their production. Some of the problems, such as defective glazes and misshapen wares, sounded like echoes of the dissatisfaction expressed by clients in Charles Pratt's time. Others related to new equipment and processes used at the plant.

⁵⁶E.G. Phillipson to Calgary, March 25, 1938 (PAA 69.235/374).

⁵⁷A.D. Cumming to E.G. Phillipson, November 15, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

⁵⁸E.G. Phillipson to Calgary Head office, June 4, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

Karl Baumler and, to a greater extent, Ed Phillipson were interested in mechanized techniques for manufacturing pottery. However, mechanization did not always translate smoothly into improvements in quality. In 1937, the company was using a machine to turn out bowls. The Canada Bread Company in Toronto received a delivery of pudding bowls, about 25% of which were unuseable: "The Bowls are badly warped," they charged, "and a great many of them should never have left the factory."⁵⁹ Interestingly, Karl Baumler's response was to blame the process. Although the bowls had been formed mechanically, they deformed slightly during drying because they were laid on uneven wooden supports.⁶⁰

In December, a new machine was purchased which could be used interchangeably for flower pots, small crocks and bowls. Because it used a stamping process, Medalta was able to increase its production of these items considerably.⁶¹ At first, though, the machine took some getting used to. Bowls stamped on the machine were sized by weight as well as by dimension. For example, an eight-inch bowl was supposed to weigh one pound, eight ounces; a ten-inch bowl was three pounds, ten ounces. The new bowls turned out to be considerably heavier: the eight-inch one weighed over two pounds, and the ten-inch one was more than four pounds. Edward Stone commented rather dryly to Cumming, "It does seem... that this heavy increase in weight will retard the selling of these bowls."⁶²

Once the problems were ironed out, however, it became clear that the machine produced a superior product. In April, 1938 Cumming sent specific instructions to Phillipson that only machine-made bowls were to be shipped from this point on: if this was not possible, shipments would have to be short. On no account were bowls made on the jigger wheel to be substituted, he stated, as "we can take no chances on creating a bad impression."⁶³ Furthermore, Cumming ordered that "from now on no bowl of any sort will be made on the wheel if same is being made by machine."⁶⁴

Medalta's problems with quality control could not all be blamed on equipment. In 1937 an order of pie pans was shipped to the Roxy Theatre in Regina, where they were to be used as giveaways to entice viewers into the theatre. The manager complained about the quality of the pans, with particular reference to the stilt marks visible on the wares. He claimed to have about 1,000 pie pans on hand which had been refused by his patrons "on account of the poor finish."⁶⁵ In a shipment of mixing bowls sent to the Variety Store in Vernon, BC, many had defective bases where "the glazing and a small quantity of pottery comes off all around in a strip... an inch to two inches long." They

⁵⁹A.W. Pratt to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, October 14, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

⁶⁰K. Baumler to E.A. Stone, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, October 20, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

⁶¹*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XII, No. 1 (January 1939) p.6.

⁶²E.A. Stone to A.D. Cumming, December 10, 1937 (PAA 69.235/370).

⁶³E.A. Stone to E.G. Phillipson, April 5, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Roxy Theatre, Regina to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, October 27, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

promised to set them aside for Medalta's travelling salesman to inspect.⁶⁶ A shipment of teapots sent to Eaton's in Montreal was such poor quality that the distributor complained they were not even good seconds. He pointed out that a coat of yellow glaze had been applied in an effort to cover up defects in the wares. "If this is an example of what the new inspector at Medicine Hat is doing" he charged, "then there is no improvement."⁶⁷

Baumler's response to dissatisfied clients was dismissive. Rather than investigating a complaint, he was more inclined to view it as "just another way of trying to avoid payment."⁶⁸ Distributors fared little better. He simply discounted Albert Pratt's steady stream of criticisms and suggestions, stating "It seems to me that the Medicine Hat Pottery Company is kicking about something or another all the time."⁶⁹ Phillipson took a different approach. While he told head office that the complaints were "certainly not music to his ears," he wished to be informed of any and every error reported to them.⁷⁰

Phillipson's attitude no doubt served the company better. It also appears there was an improvement in the quality of Medalta's wares following his arrival.⁷¹ Phillipson's attention to precision and standards allowed the company to state in its catalogue of hotel china:

Medalta Ware is made under the strictest conditions and specifications as laid down by the American Standards for Testing Material Society (known as 'A.S.T.M. Specifications')... Medalta Ware is tested for Impact and Chipping by the International accepted instrument designated 'Impact Testing Apparatus for Chinaware' as designed by the Bureau of Standards Ceramic Division, Washington, D.C.⁷²

The improvements and innovations which Phillipson introduced were timely. The company's list of clients was about to include an important new customer: the federal government. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the business of pottery manufacturing in Canada changed dramatically. Both Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries were suddenly thrust into a new market where tight quality controls and imperative shipping deadlines taxed the companies' abilities to perform. However, the financial rewards of meeting this market's needs eased the difficulty of adjustment.

⁶⁶April 19, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

⁶⁷L.H. Melville, Medalta Sales Reg'd., Montreal to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, July 8, 1940 (PAA 69.235/404).

⁶⁸K. Baumler to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary October 25, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

⁶⁹K. Baumler to E.A. Stone, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, October 20, 1937 (PAA 69.235/367).

⁷⁰Medicine Hat to Calgary, May 21, 1938 (PAA 69.235/376).

⁷¹*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XII, No. 1 (January 1939) pp.6-7.

⁷²*Catalogue of Vitrified Hotel & Restaurant China, Ovenware and Stoneware by Medalta*, c.1947: p.30 (Glenbow Archives M6117).

CHAPTER 8

NAVIGATING THE WAR YEARS

Canada declared war on Germany on September 10, 1939. The declaration ushered in a period of crisis and change in Canadian society, accompanied by a burst of economic growth strong enough to lift the country out of the Depression. The war had a profound impact on Canadian industry, and rescued the economy of Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat's economic position before the war was dismal. The city had gone heavily into debt in the 1910s, justified only by optimistic expectations for the future. Bonds of over three million dollars had been issued on the natural gas system, the electrical department and the waterworks. The boom began to peter out in 1914. The city's remoteness from large eastern markets was a considerable handicap, and long freight hauls presented a serious problem to those who had held high hopes for the city's development.¹ By the 1920s the city's finances were in such poor shape that public works employees were given tickets for meals and accommodation which restaurant and rooming house operators could use to pay their utility bills. Things grew worse during the heavy relief years of the Depression. It was not until the outbreak of World War II that Medicine Hat's industries began to pick up. Swamped with wartime orders, they were quickly operating at capacity production again.²

Wartime orders transformed the pottery industry in Medicine Hat. Pottery manufacturing was considered essential wartime business. Civilian demand increased when import restrictions affected the availability of foreign dishes and crockery. More importantly, the military required huge quantities of dishes for the armed forces. Government involvement in the potteries gave an enormous boost to production, and changed the scale and significance of the industry dramatically during the 1940s. Figures for Medalta reveal a dramatic turnaround: the annual report for 1942 shows an increase of 23% in total earnings over 1941.³ The following chart (Figure 9) gives an indication of the impact Canadian wartime contracts had on pottery sales for manufacturers in Alberta and in the rest of Canada:

¹ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (March 1945) p.9.

² George Yackulic, "Western Industrial Communities: Medicine Hat, Alberta," *Western Business and Industry* Vol. 19, No. 7 (July 1945): p.21.

³ Earnings for 1942 totalled \$51,136, as compared to \$41,422 for 1941 [*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVI, No. 6 (June 1943) p.7].

Figure 9
Wartime Pottery Production, 1938-1949



WARTIME PRODUCTION

World War II brought a burst of prosperity to the potteries in Medicine Hat. Foreign trade was interrupted, and supplies of pottery from England and Europe started to fall off as early as 1938.⁴ Light dinner ware, one of several items on which the import trade depended, was simply not procurable.⁵ In addition, civilian requests for chinaware reached unusual heights, as much as 30% over peacetime requirements. Hotels and restaurants found it hard to keep supplies on hand, due to heavy breakage at the hands of "inexperienced and indifferent help."⁶

The pottery industry benefitted from an increased civilian demand for pottery, especially as imports from Europe and Japan were cut off. But an even greater source of economic benefit was presented by the federal government. The tin normally used to manufacture dishes for the armed forces was required for other uses, and pottery was selected as a replacement. The federal government began placing huge orders for dishes with potteries throughout Canada.

⁴ *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada, 1938*. Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa, 1940).

⁵ T. O'Connor, Johnson & Barbour, London Ontario to Ed Phillipson, Medalta Potteries Ltd., undated; ca. April 1940 (PAA 69.235/408).

⁶ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XVI, No. 11 (November 1943).

By 1942 the military was absorbing almost one hundred percent of Canadian pottery production.⁷ The Wartime Prices and Trade Board set up a separate Ceramics Division in 1942 and appointed W.G. Pulkingham, founder and President of Sovereign Potteries in Hamilton, as its technical advisor. His role was to assist potteries across Canada in changing over from non-essential business to wartime production.⁸ One Toronto pottery owner said that, thanks to the Division's assistance, his firm would be able to switch over to the new production quite easily, and without much loss:

They have been telling firms what must be done. Those which cannot meet the Wartime Prices and Trade Board requests are out of luck... They have been very helpful.⁹

The Ceramics Division was responsible for correlating the output of Canadian potteries. By coordinating production on a national scale, the Division was able to increase the industry's economic efficiency. Part of its role was the conservation of supplies and resources required for wartime applications. It advised the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, for example, when available supplies of china ware and crockery began to fall short of military requirements in 1942. The Board responded by disallowing the popular "Dinnerware Night" at movie theatres as of September 30, 1942. Dishes which were distributed to theatre patrons as an incentive for going to the movies were more urgently required elsewhere. The Board's restriction covered both manufacture and distribution of the wares.¹⁰

Clay products in general took on greater significance during the war years. Manufacturers were encouraged to explore new uses for ceramic products, and new product lines were developed in response to wartime restrictions. Ceramic ware resisted rust and contamination, and could be turned out in almost any shape and size. A long list of ceramic specialties was added to the output of Canadian ceramic plants as clay was substituted for steel, alloys, rubber and plastics. "Canada's recent development in the ceramic field has been rather wonderful," reported the *Globe and Mail*, "and a great many new products are now made in Canada from Canadian feldspars, clays, and shales."¹¹ By April of 1943, a Ceramic Advisory Board was established to recommend the development of new ceramic wares which could replace items made of metal or other critical materials.¹²

⁷ *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 19, 1942.

⁸ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XV, No. 8 (August 1942), p.6.

⁹ H.T. Burrell of the Dondale Pottery Company, quoted in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XV, No. 11 (November 1942), p.6.

¹⁰ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XV, No. 9 (September 1942), p. 4.

¹¹ G.C. Keith, "Ceramic Lines Widen Rapidly in War Effort," reprinted from the *Globe and Mail* (January 6, 1943) in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVI, No. 1 (January 1943) p.3.

¹² *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XVI, No. 4 (April 1943), p.3.

At the same time that ceramic product lines were being expanded, pottery production was restricted. The federal government placed mandatory simplification regulations on pottery manufacturers through the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, which ordered Canadian potteries to manufacture only "utility wares" as of January 1943.

Frills of all types have been sacrificed and the varieties of pottery cut to 136 items in the semi-porcelain, vitrified and stoneware, in an effort to make the most efficient use of Canada's productive capacity.¹³

Only plain white ware could be produced. The purchase of pigments or colouring agents of any kind was completely restricted. Styles were also regulated by the order: manufacturers were not permitted to acquire any new moulds, and could make only one design of each kind of ware they produced. Cups had to be manufactured without handles as this simplified production: 9 million handleless cups could be made for every 3 million handled cups. Decorated wares were expressly forbidden. Not even a regimental crest or name could be placed on the wares. Only marks which identified the manufacturer were permitted.

The intent of the pottery simplification regulations was to reduce manufacturing costs. If pottery was undecorated and simplified in style, it would be less expensive to produce. Canadian manufacturers could then meet the enormous domestic demand for lower-priced dishes, filling in the market niche vacated by England, Japan and Central Europe as a result of wartime import restrictions.¹⁴ Domestic sales were of critical importance to the federal government for, as one of Medalta's agents pointed out:

The Government is drilling it into the ears of all the manufacturers that their production must go on as usual, so that wages can be paid and taxes can be paid, in order to pay for the war.¹⁵

¹³The 136 items were categorized as follows: 40 items in semi-porcelain (including one size of cup, saucer, tea plate and dinner plate; two sizes of platters, three of pitchers and teapots); 52 in stoneware (including mixing bowls, pudding bowls, milk pitchers, ten sizes of crocks with covers, and three sizes of teapot); and 41 in hotel china (including four varieties of cups or mugs, 3 sizes of plates, three of milk pitchers, and one size of soup bowl). Reported in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (January 1943) p.13.

¹⁴Regulations listed in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (January 1943) p.13. Restrictions began to ease in September of 1943, but it was not until March, 1944 that all controls requiring the production of standard, undecorated pottery were removed. Price controls remained in effect, limiting mark-ups and discounts to the basic price ceilings set in 1941. An increasing proportion of pottery wares was available for civilian output, although some potteries continued to make utility wares under the government's system of price controls. (*Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 [March 1945], p.17.)

¹⁵E. Cunliffe, Renwick & Cunliffe, Vancouver, to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta, July 1940 (PAA 69.235/388).

However, federal efforts to boost pottery sales worked at cross purposes against the military needs which still took first priority over civilian orders. Government requirements took an enormous bite out of the pottery supply, leaving other customers scrambling for merchandise. At first, Medalta responded to civilian demand by giving stock lists to company agents, and getting them to sell out whatever excess wares were on hand.¹⁶ Store owners in Medicine Hat were reduced to picking through Medalta's seconds and breakage.¹⁷

Despite the heavy demand, Medalta's potential for success was still hampered by production problems. "If you had a machine to get the impurities out of your clay our product would meet with more approval," cautioned one agent.¹⁸ Prices also needed to be reduced if Medalta was to compete with the Japanese wares which were still being imported during the early years of the War: "Unfortunately our People won't be Patriotic when it costs them money."¹⁹

By 1940, Medalta was struggling to meet its commitments, and both civilian and military orders began to suffer. Military orders grew at a pace which outstripped Medalta's capabilities, with production schedules and quantities which stretched the factory's capacity to its limits. Medalta missed so many delivery deadlines in 1940 that an urgent telegraph was sent from the Department of Munitions and Supply in October stating, "Orders... are far behind schedule Stop These dishes urgently required Stop Must have better deliveries."²⁰ At the same time, the company's regular customers were receiving short shrift. Ben Cunliffe, Medalta's Vancouver distributor, was panicking over orders placed in March and April which were still undelivered in November:

Honestly Ed, you have me worried stiff, you see a date does not seem to mean a thing to you, on the other hand in the relation between seller and buyer, that is between me and the customer, a delivery date is something almost sacred for the success or failure of a transaction.²¹

Something had to give, and in 1941 Cumming stopped producing lamp bases and other artwares to concentrate on manufacturing dishes.²² Medalta continued to supply

¹⁶ Medalta Potteries to L.H. Melville, Medalta Sales, July 12, 1940 (PAA 69.235/404).

¹⁷ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat, August 13, 1992.

¹⁸ T. O'Connor, Johnson & Barbour, London Ontario to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta Potteries Ltd., undated; ca. April 1940 (PAA 69.235/408).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ October 25, 1940 (PAA 69.235/395).

²¹ B. Cunliffe, Renwick & Cunliffe, Vancouver to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta, December 1940 (PAA 69.235.388).

²² Medalta to Creston Valley Co-Operative Association, BC, October 16, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10); T. O'Connor, Johnson & Barbour, London Ontario to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta Potteries Ltd., undated; ca. April 1941 (PAA 69.235/408).

dishes to the armed forces, and sold thousands of water coolers to the navy for use on board ships.²³

Medicine Hat Potteries took the opposite approach in the early years of the war. The dinnerware it produced was not sturdy enough to meet military requirements, so it enjoyed an unparalleled opportunity to focus on civilian orders. Capitalizing on the fact that Japanese pottery imports were cut off, the Yuills concentrated on manufacturing artware.²⁴ Where Medalta was turning out bowls, teapots and jugs, Medicine Hat Potteries was making "ornaments of buffalo, mounted policemen, dogs, cats and the like."²⁵ When Medalta stopped making lamp bases, the Yuills quickly moved in to fill the gap. In April, 1941 one of Medalta's agents reported back to Phillipson:

Medicine Hat [Potteries] are getting a lot of Business on [lamp] Bases since Mr. Cumming took from us this item... However, if the Factory wants to do this it is their Business. I personally think it is a mistake, and to prove it Medicine Hat [Potteries] have sold 10,000 Bases in Toronto.²⁶

Numerous businesses were licensed by the War Time Prices and Trade Board to continue their retail operations during the war. Medicine Hat Potteries dealt with Woolworth's, Kresge's, Woodward's, Hudson's Bay, Metropolitan Stores, and Eaton's as well as several locally-run businesses in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.²⁷

Pottery production was sufficiently lucrative that Harlan ("Hop") Yuill opened another pottery in 1941. The new operation was set up in Bill Wyatt's former pottery in Redcliff, and given the same name: Alberta Potteries Limited. Production was initially confined to mixing bowls, but subsequently expanded to include other stoneware lines and a small range of artware.²⁸

Artware production was brought to a halt in 1943. The simplification regulations ordered by the Wartime Prices and Trade Board compelled the Yuills to restrict their production to white ware for the duration of the war. Pitchers, bowls, teapots and other items were "withheld from the market due to wartime priority tasks."²⁹ Medicine Hat

²³A.D. Cumming, President and Managing Director, Medalta Potteries Ltd., to Christie School Supply Ltd., Brandon, November 1, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

²⁴W.G. Armstrong to the Board of Industrial Relations, February 8, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

²⁵F.A. Cope, Calgary to K.A. Pugh, Acting Chief Inspector, Edmonton, March 15, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

²⁶T. O'Connor, Johnson & Barbour, London Ontario to E.G. Phillipson, Medalta Potteries Ltd., undated; ca. April 1941 (PAA 69.235/408).

²⁷C.P.I.C. Archives, Yuill Papers.

²⁸Kathleen Dirk, "Living in Medicine Hat: The Yuill History 1883 to 1985." (Unpublished report prepared for Monarch Industries Ltd., Medicine Hat, Alberta) pp. 19-20.

²⁹Advertisement for Medicine Hat Potteries in *Western Business and Industry* Vol. 20, No. 9 (September 1946) p.57.

Potteries began turning out white semi-porcelain dishes, and did not resume production of its colourful product lines until 1946.

Government business was hard not only on civilian clients, but also on the distributors who marketed pottery wares. Military orders were placed directly with the pottery plants, and did not go through suppliers. Medalta's agents began to feel the pinch as increasing numbers of orders were consumed by the federal government, and warned the company not to neglect its civilian customers. As one of them pointed out rather anxiously to Cumming:

I do not want to be forgotten down here now that we have plenty of Government business on hand... we must not forget that this war will not last forever and the manner in which our trade is being taken care of now will decide what future business we get, when this Country will once more be flooded with Foreign merchandise.³⁰

By 1945, Cumming himself became concerned about the scale of Medalta's government commitments. He wrote to the Department of Munitions and Supply that their obligations to the federal government were going to make a significant cut into the company's civilian trade. "We are agreeing to furnish you with about 60,000 pieces this month," he noted somewhat dubiously, "[but] this will mean that there will be 60,000 pieces less for civilian trade."³¹

COPING WITH THE LABOUR SHORTAGE ♦

Compounding the problems of supply and demand was the severe labour shortage which plagued the industry throughout the war years. Employment in Canadian ceramic industries increased by 35% during the war, despite heavy enlistment in the armed forces.³² Pottery plants were caught in the crunch between an increased demand for their wares, and a reduced labour supply for producing them. Factories had two alternatives: they could conserve the labour force they had, and they could find innovative sources for supplying the additional labour they needed.

To conserve their existing labour force, pottery factories began to pay more attention to health and safety issues. The Industrial Safety Convention, which met each year in conjunction with the Annual Convention of the Canadian Ceramic Society in Toronto, reported record attendance in 1943:

³⁰L.H. Melville, Medalta Sales Reg'd., Montreal to Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary, August 1, 1940 (PAA 69.235/404).

³¹A.D. Cumming to the Department of Munitions and Supply, February 6, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

³²*Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (January 1945) p.6.

At this time, when labour is at a premium, accident prevention is more necessary than ever. The fact that over 2,000 registered at this year's convention indicated the keen interest in the subject among manufacturers.³³

The pottery industry developed a heightened response to health risks during the war years. Even existing hazards took on a new profile. For example silicosis, a deadly disease of the lungs caused by inhalation of silica dust, was first drawn to the attention of Canadian ceramic manufacturers in 1932.³⁴ However, it was not until 1940 that it emerged as a major concern in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*. A bold headline, "Silicosis and Lead Poisoning Among Pottery Workers," heralded the findings of the US Public Health Service. Employees working for protracted periods of time in the areas of clay processing, slip preparation, or firing were found to be at risk. In these areas, dust concentrations normally exceeded four million particles per cubic foot, the threshold level for danger. Of those who had worked more than thirty years in these areas, between 50 and 75% were already diagnosed with the disease.³⁵

By 1943, the Workmen's Compensation Board of Alberta was conducting regular inspections of pottery factories to determine the levels of silica and lead particles circulating through the plants. Detailed laboratory analyses of dust counts and air samples were conducted. Medicine Hat Potteries was assessed in September 1943 by Roy Elfstrom from the Division of Industrial Hygiene.³⁶ He found laboratory dust counts as high as 40 million particles per cubic foot – ten times in excess of the levels documented as dangerous by the Public Health Service. Elfstrom recommended the factory should install automatic ventilating equipment, although he allowed that "owing to war conditions you will not likely be able to secure ventilating equipment for some time."³⁷ As a minimum, the factory was instructed to provide approved respirators.

The Workmen's Compensation Board also reviewed the safety committee at Medicine Hat Potteries as part of the same inspection. It strongly recommended that the committee be increased from one member to three, including at least one woman.

We find industries with active safety committees have a much better accident experience than those without a committee... An active safety committee can contribute very materially in helping to keep workmen steadily employed and on the job.³⁸

³³ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVI, No. 5 (May 1943) p.3.

³⁴ Annual Meeting of the Industrial Accident Prevention Association of Ontario, reported in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. V, No. 5 (May 1932) p.5.

³⁵ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XIII, No. 1 (January 1940) pp. 25-26.

³⁶ "Division of Industrial Hygiene Field Trip Report, October 22, 1943 (PAA 69.131/2021).

³⁷ Safety Supervisor, Workmen's Compensation Board to J.H. Yuill, Medicine Hat Potteries, November 10, 1943 (PAA 69.131/2021).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Conservation played an important part in protecting the potteries' labour force. However 1944 and 1945 saw a major increase in the numbers of male employees enlisting in the armed forces. To fill their additional labour needs, Medicine Hat factories turned to whatever alternative sources they could find: women, farmers, home defense personnel, and German Prisoners-of-War. They attempted to hire children, and even tried to recall enlisted service men from Europe to resume their posts at the jigger machines.

Women were the first to find new job opportunities in Medicine Hat's clay products industry. In some respects, it was advantageous to the potteries to have additional female staff. Walter Armstrong, manager of Medicine Hat Potteries, observed: "Our work for these girls is not hard but requires the small and quick hands that are not found in male employees."³⁹ The only problem appeared to be that the company hired all its new female employees at apprentice rates. This violated the regulations of the Board of Industrial Relations, which stipulated that "not more than 25% of the female employees ordinarily employed can be classed as apprentices."⁴⁰ Walter Armstrong and Hop Yuill both argued that it was impossible to hire trained help, and likewise impossible to maintain the ratio ordered by the Board as "it would be years before [they] would be able to get together



The wartime labour shortage forced Medicine Hat Potteries to hire its first female jigger operator, shown here on the far left. (Medicine Hat Potteries, WWII: unnumbered photo, CPIC Archives.)

³⁹W.G. Armstrong to the Board of Industrial Relations, February 8, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁴⁰K.A. Pugh, Acting Chief Inspector, Board of Industrial Relations to W.G. Armstrong, Medicine Hat Potteries (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

any reasonable amount of trained girls."⁴¹ As Hop Yuill explained, it had not been the pottery's intention to circumvent the regulations:

Enlistments among our male help has made it necessary for us to take on more female help than it is our wish but we have no alternative.⁴²

Inspectors from the Board of Industrial Relations had previously noted that women working at Medicine Hat Potteries were paid more than was required by the Board's regulations – by as much as \$1.50 per week.⁴³ As a result, the Board responded with lenience and initially granted Yuill an extension. However, by June 1941 the situation was still not rectified. Medicine Hat Potteries was ordered to increase the wages paid to its female staff in accordance with the required percentage.

Women played an increasingly significant role in Medicine Hat Potteries' labour force, as indicated in the following table (Figure 10). When the factory opened for

Figure 10
Men and Women Employed at Medicine Hat Potteries,
available years from 1938-1953



⁴¹W.G. Armstrong to the Board of Industrial Relations, February 8, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁴²J.H. Yuill to K.A. Pugh, Acting Chief Inspector, Board of Industrial Relations, May 29, 1941 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁴³F.A. Cope, Calgary to K.A. Pugh, Acting Chief Inspector, Edmonton, March 15, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

production in 1938, there were only men on staff. Women were first hired in 1939, and within five years exceeded the number of men on staff by 38%.⁴⁴

Women also found employment at Medicine Hat Brick & Tile, starting in 1942. Here, the work was heavier and harder, unlike the work in the potteries:

In brick plants where female labor is employed it has been found best to let the women start gradually. They should not be kept too long on one job at first. By rotating them around the plant, doing a variety of jobs, they are relieved of the possibility of excessive fatigue.⁴⁵

A new working environment was created in the brick plants with the introduction of female labour. Washrooms had to be built, eating rooms set apart, and arrangements made for purchasing candy and cigarettes.⁴⁶ A correspondent for the *Clay Products News*



Women began working in the brickyards as well as the pottery plants. (Unloading hollow clay tile from scove kiln into box car, circa 1942: P442.499, MHM&AG.)

⁴⁴K.A. Pugh, Acting Chief Inspector, Board of Industrial Relations to W. Armstrong, Medicine Hat Potteries (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁴⁵*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVI, No. 1 (January 1943) p.9.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

& *Ceramic Record* noted in January, 1944 that Medicine Hat was busy "making full use of its mighty gas on the firing line and its manly women on the assembly line."⁴⁷ By the end of the year, labour relief was announced for clay products manufacturers: military authorities assigned home defense personnel to brick and tile plants to overcome the shortage of brick and tile required for constructing military hospitals.⁴⁸

Pottery manufacturers received no consideration for the labour shortage in their industry, which by 1943 was becoming serious. Karl Baumler wrote in desperation to the Board of Industrial Relations: "We beg to inquire if it is permissible [sic] to employ boys under 15 years of age in the Pottery Industry for the summer holidays?"⁴⁹ The Board responded in short order that children could not be employed under any circumstances. Arthur Cumming addressed his complaint to the Department of National Defence: "We are nearly driven to distraction for labor which is trained for our type of work at the plant," he lamented. "About eighty of our former employees have joined the armed forces and we find it very difficult to operate."⁵⁰ Cumming thought he had discovered an opportunity for leverage when an urgent order was placed by the Department of Munitions and Supply:

We note in your wire that these [orders] are extremely urgent and bear the highest priority. We are wondering if this will bear enough priority to get some of our best jiggersmen back, who are now in Italy. We understand that two of them have been wounded [and] are now in hospital.⁵¹

Despite his efforts to influence the Department, Cumming was forced to find employees closer to home. By the winter of 1945, Medalta was employing farmers on a temporary basis to cover its labour needs, as approved by the federal government.⁵² The company also began taking on Prisoners-of-War from Medicine Hat's internment camp. In February, Cumming had fifty POWs working at Medalta.⁵³ They were paid fifty cents

⁴⁷Vol. XVII, No. 1 (January 1944), p.10.

⁴⁸*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVII, No. 12 (December 1944).

⁴⁹K. Baumler to the Board of Industrial Relations, July 7, 1943 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁵⁰A.D. Cumming to Col. Ross, Deputy Minister of National Defence, Ottawa, February 15, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵¹A.D. Cumming to E.J. Delisle, Department of Munitions and Supply, Ottawa, February 6, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵²Medalta Potteries to D.M. Barton, Survey Officer, National Selective Service, Edmonton (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵³A.D. Cumming to E.J. Delisle, Department of Munitions and Supply, Ottawa, February 6, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10). As well, Cumming took on about a dozen POWs to work at the Medicine Hat Greenhouses, which he also owned. The Greenhouses provided a steady market for Medalta's flower pots. (AD Cumming to Director of Labour Projects (POWs), Department of Labour, Ottawa, February 16, 1945 [PAA 69.216/10]).

a day for their work by the federal government, which was placed in a trust account made out to the Medicine Hat Internment Camp.⁵⁴

The Prisoners-of-War were happy to get out of the internment camp, and Cumming was glad to have the extra hands. But by October of 1945, the Canadian Legion became upset at the continuing employment of POWs. As increasing numbers of personnel were discharged from the armed services, the Legion argued that employment and rehabilitation for veterans was paramount. The Medicine Hat Branch was incensed that Medalta retained POWs at the plant. They reluctantly conceded that wartime labour shortages might have made it necessary for Medalta to take on POWs in the first place, but they were adamant on getting rid of them:

The time has arrived when the prisoners of war should be returned to where they rightfully belong, the interment camp, and the work taken over by civilian labour, ex-members of the armed forces being given first preference.⁵⁵

The complaint was forwarded to Medalta's head office in Calgary, and Cumming responded in person. Careful to protect the company's reputation, Cumming assured the Legion that they were laying off the internees as rapidly as they could: "We are as anxious as anyone in Canada to get rid of these POWs, but," he added pointedly, "we cannot disrupt our manufacturing too much."⁵⁶

Manufacturing, from Cumming's perspective, had suffered enough disruptions. Labour was not the only commodity in short supply during the war years. Potteries were continually short on the chemical supplies they required. Some items, like tin, were in short supply and only certain priority uses were allowed. Moreover, supplies did not return to normal until July of 1946.⁵⁷ Uranium, used in potteries as a colouring agent for glazes, was hard to get. Zinc oxide was confiscated for the war effort as it was needed for making tires. Ed Phillipson, plant manager at Medalta, was able to obtain what he called "chimney" zinc from the smokestacks at Cominco Steel in Trail, British Columbia. Normally thrown out because it was such a low grade, Phillipson was able to purify it sufficiently that it could be used in pottery manufacture. In similar fashion, he was able to find a supplier for "dirty" cobalt from Cobalt, Ontario; after purification, he could retrieve 25% of the product as useable.⁵⁸

⁵⁴C.T. Richardson, Accountant to Commandant, Medicine Hat Internment Camp, March 5, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵⁵C.H. Park, Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Legion, Medicine Hat to the Superintendent, Medalta Potteries, October 24, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵⁶A.D. Cumming to C.H. Park, Canadian Legion, Medicine Hat, November 2, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵⁷G.A. Lawson, General Chemicals Division, Canadian Industries Ltd., to Medalta Potteries, November 5, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁵⁸Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat, December 4, 1994.

The war years certainly created problems for the pottery industry. Wartime production required scrimping and improvising. Huge military contracts created difficulties in terms of labour and supplies, and disgruntled the industry's civilian clients and distributors. But the war also provided enormous benefits. Business in Medicine Hat's potteries was never better. Job opportunities were plentiful, and working conditions were safer and more pleasant than they had ever been. There were long-term advantages as well. The federal government was willing to invest in factories engaged in wartime production, and Medalta was able to make some much-needed improvements. Dishes made for military use had to meet strict specifications, and new lab facilities were added to allow more thorough testing procedures.⁵⁹ In the spring of 1944, Medalta installed a tunnel kiln, 160 feet long, insulated with volcanic ash. This allowed the company to increase production to more than twice its previous capacity. In announcing the expansion, Medalta stated its intention to make fine dinner ware after the war in addition to the heavy dishes it had been producing for military use.⁶⁰ Once the war was over, Ed Phillipson was able to purchase a hangar from the military airport which was being closed down. The building was dismantled and then re-erected at Medalta, where it was used for more office and laboratory space.⁶¹

As 1945 drew to a close, Phillipson prepared a preview of the pottery business for 1946. The war years had provided him with a unique opportunity to expand his career: he had started at Medalta in 1938, fresh from the University of Saskatchewan, with the challenge of rescuing a company which had just lost its senior staff to Medicine Hat Potteries. He experimented with developing hotel china, and had just perfected it to the point of commercial viability when orders from the military began to pour in. He then experienced the most productive period in the history of Medalta's operations, and of the pottery industry in Medicine Hat. As he looked forward to 1946, Phillipson must have sensed that the glory days were over when he observed: "We doubt very much if we will ever be able to produce merchandise with the same number of hands as we did in 1938 and 1939."⁶²

Phillipson saw 1946 as a time for Medalta to face the enormous task of recovering from the war effort. Staff were working feverishly to retool the plant for peacetime production. The tired machines which had worked overtime throughout the war years had to be replaced, and new pottery designs developed for the changing tastes of Canadian consumers. Business looked promising: plans were afoot to expand the company's operations, and Phillipson was confident they would sell all the merchandise they could manufacture. But looming over this cheerful prospect was the labour problem:

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (January 1944) p.5, and Vol. XVII, No 4 (April 1944) p.6.

⁶¹ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat, August 13, 1992.

⁶² "Preview of Pottery Business for 1946," (PAA 69.216/10).

There is so much agitation amongst labour for higher wages and shorter hours... We do know that wages are going to be at least 50% higher, which, of course, must reflect on the selling price of merchandise. However, this company is not averse to paying higher wages provided the general public is willing to pay the prices necessary to offset increased wages.⁶³

Strict wage and price controls had been enforced by the federal government during the war in an effort to avoid inflationary price rises.⁶⁴ Labour unions had been chafing at the restrictions since the early 1940s, to the point where the federal Liberal government passed an order-in-council in 1943 outlawing strikes for the duration of the war.⁶⁵ The labour situation was by no means stable, and Phillipson predicted that it would be one of the major problems the company would have to contend with in the coming year. "As a whole," he concluded, "the picture for 1946 is bright on one side and rather gloomy on the other."

POST-WAR PROSPERITY FOR THE CLAY PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

The Canadian clay products industry continued to grow at a record pace after the war. Construction had been limited in the early 1940s: the federal government banned non-essential building, and bricklayers were in drastically short supply.⁶⁶ But the post-war period saw an enormous demand for houses, with a corresponding demand for brick, tile, sewer pipe, and other clay products. Lumber was both scarce and expensive, and ceramic materials offered a welcome alternative.⁶⁷ Alberta Clay Products was so busy in 1946 that it was forced to turn orders away:

The situation with us is so bad that we are manufacturing and shipping against a backlog of orders that will take our total output capacity until some time in 1948. The other manufacturers of brick in this district are in a similar position.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Notice to Canadian Workers from the Minister of Labour, Ottawa, May 6, 1946; printed in *Western Business and Industry* Vol. 20, No. 6 (June 1946).

⁶⁵ W. Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1979) p.132.

⁶⁶ L.E. Shaw, "Impressions of the West," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (January 1944) p.10.

⁶⁷ "The Manufacture and Use of Hollow Concrete Block." University of Saskatchewan College of Engineering Housing Circular 17/2/47 (U of S Archives MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

⁶⁸ J.H. Yuill to Green, Blenkins & Russell, Winnipeg, December 30, 1946 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

The pottery industry also benefitted from the post-war focus on domestic peace and prosperity. Sales of Medicine Hat's pottery continued to climb in 1945, reaching a record high in 1946. A survey on consumer trends conducted by McLean-Hunter just after the war concluded that Canadian housewives were ready to start spending on pottery: "In table china it is estimated that upwards of 500,000 families intend to spend \$10,070,000."⁶⁹ Medalta was so busy that it could not handle all its orders. By October of 1945, Medalta was receiving inquiries about resuming its artware production; however, Phillipson did not think it would be possible until early in 1946.⁷⁰

Medicine Hat Potteries was busy as well. Production facilities had been geared to peak production during the war, and continued at top speed in the years immediately following the war to fill the demands of the home market. Although export markets were ready and open, Medicine Hat Potteries was unable to produce any surplus goods to meet the demand. As late as 1947, the plant's facilities were still completely taken up with the manufacture of plain white ware, with no resources left over for producing coloured ware. Even their trademark "Hatina" breakfast sets were on hold.⁷¹

Business was so successful that the Yuills expanded their marketing and sales.⁷² In 1945, Hop Yuill opened a new marketing division in Montreal called Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Limited. William T. Clarke, who ran the Toronto distributorship, was appointed as Manager for a yearly remuneration of \$5,000. The office was administered by Miss S. Hoey, who also served as a Director of the company.⁷³

Production at Medicine Hat Potteries increased through 1946, and Ceramic Sales began seeking clients in the Maritimes and the Madeleine Islands.⁷⁴ They arranged to supply the lucrative mail-order businesses of Eaton's and the Dupuis Frères.⁷⁵ By 1947, Hop Yuill confessed that orders for wares had overtaken the plant's capabilities:

⁶⁹ *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XVIII, No. 6 (June 1945), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Medalta to Creston Valley Co-Operative Association, BC, October 16, 1945 (PAA 69.216/10).

⁷¹ "Medicine Hat Potteries," *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XX, No. 8 (August 1947) p. 11.

⁷² The Toronto office continued to handle orders for Medicine Hat Potteries, while also controlling several agencies in the United States and England. Ceramic Sales focused on Québec and the Maritimes (J.H. Yuill to N.E. Munson, Winnipeg, December 8, 1947 [CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers]).

⁷³ Minutes of a Special General Meeting of Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Limited, July 23, 1945 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁷⁴ S. Hoey, Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Ltd. to J.H. Yuill, November 15, 1946 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁷⁵ F.R. Bourne, Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Ltd. to J.H. Yuill, March 10, 1947 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

Production is keeping up, but until we can further increase it difficulties may continue. Our back orders here exceed those of a year ago, so we are really not making much headway.⁷⁶

Ceramic Sales placed orders totalling over one million pieces for 1947, including plates, bowls, pitchers, cups and saucers. This was in addition to back orders for 1946 of over 600,000 pieces which were still undelivered.⁷⁷ By 1949, Medicine Hat Potteries was managing to meet its orders, but Yuill warned Hoey that certain items such as ten-inch bowls would still be in short supply until he could increase the kiln capacity: "Do not sell them too strong," he advised her, "as there is a larger demand than we are able to take care of."⁷⁸ The factory was so busy that there had not even been time to update the company's brochures. In 1949 Ceramic Sales was still using pamphlets printed with the proviso, 'Due to Wartime Restrictions,' which illustrated only a small portion of the company's product lines.⁷⁹

As Phillipson had predicted in 1945, the pottery industry enjoyed a bright and prosperous period in the years immediately following the war. But his suggestion that labour problems would surface was also right. The 'gloomy' side of the picture which Phillipson foreshadowed was far bigger than he had imagined, and much more damaging.

⁷⁶J.H. Yuill to F.R. Bourne, Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Ltd., March 13, 1947 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁷⁷"Whiteware Requirements for the Year 1947," Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Ltd., March 10, 1947 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁷⁸J.H. Yuill to S. Hoey, Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Ltd., March 25, 1949 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁷⁹S. Hoey, Ceramic Sales (Quebec) Ltd., to J.H. Yuill, January 20, 1949 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

CHAPTER 9

A MILITANT LABOUR FORCE

Labour unrest swept through Canada in the years following the end of World War II. Strikes and lockouts consumed 50% of the country's working time in 1946, when production was interrupted by 228 strikes and lockouts. Similar levels of disruption had never been recorded in Canadian history.¹ Lowered production, absenteeism, tension and strikes were the symptoms. It made little difference whether the prevailing government was CCF or Social Credit, Liberal or Conservative. Nor did the many types of labour legislation found in the various provinces seem to have any influence. The Editor of the *Medicine Hat News* attributed the sense of uneasiness and fear in the labour ranks to a dread recollection of the unemployment and relief lines of the Depression:

There persists the feeling that unemployment is the norm rather than the exception. He is convinced that the present labor boom will not continue... So today labor's main thought is to obtain security, union security, at any cost.²

Union activity in Medicine Hat surged after the war, and became a dominant influence in the clay products industry. Clay products' workers accounted for some 20% of Medicine Hat's labour force in 1947. In that year, almost all of them went on strike. They wanted higher wages, shorter hours, and union recognition. The strikes had a major impact on the community of Medicine Hat, and created a heated election campaign at the close of the year. The longest and largest of the strikes was at Medalta Potteries, where 213 employees struck for 72 days between August 12 and October 24, 1947.

WALKOUT AT MEDICINE HAT POTTERIES

The first strike broke out on July 7, 1947. One hundred employees at Medicine Hat Potteries called a wildcat walkout, demanding a union shop, a forty-hour work week, and a blanket wage increase of 20 cents per hour. The contract between the company and the workers had expired on July 3, and negotiations were actually under way when the strike commenced. The company was not notified of the work stoppage, and the union made no appeal for conciliation proceedings.³ Pottery workers were joined on July 8 by 85 employees of Alberta Clay Products.⁴

¹Statistics taken by the Canadian Department of Labour.

²Editorial, *Medicine Hat News*, September 11, 1947.

³*Medicine Hat News*, July 7, 1947.

⁴*Medicine Hat News*, July 8, 1947.

The strikers returned to work on July 9, after a big parade and rally the previous evening. The event was headed by union organizers and officers including James Henderson and Barry McGuire.⁵ Henderson was the Edmonton representative of the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), an affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and was responsible for organizing labour unions in southern Alberta. McGuire hailed from Vancouver, and was the CCL-CIO organizer for Alberta and British Columbia. What were these two men doing at a brief, two-day strike in a localized industry in the small city of Medicine Hat? It would appear they were following instructions. The Canadian Congress of Labour had passed a resolution in 1946 to "see that more time and money [were] spent, both by the Congress and its affiliates, on organizational work in the Province of Alberta."⁶

Henderson gave a speech at the rally on July 8, stating that the strike was called "to show industrialists of Medicine Hat we mean business." He promised that by returning to their jobs on July 9, the workers were giving the company "one more chance to reach an agreement on our demands."⁷ It is therefore interesting to note that the conditions which the workers agreed to when negotiations concluded on July 16 were as follows: a wage increase of only 8 cents per hour, a 44-hour work week and an agreement that, while employees could maintain their union membership, there would be no union shop clause.⁸ The union failed to achieve any of its objectives, and left its members feeling dissatisfied with their representation.⁹

MEDALTA VOTES FOR MINE-MILL

The CCL clearly decided to step up its campaign. The most militant union affiliated with the CCL and the CIO was the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. Mine-Mill was one of the major bases of support for the Communist Party within the labour movement, both in Alberta and nationally.¹⁰ In 1947, Mine-Mill moved into Medicine Hat to win bargaining rights for Medalta Potteries. The company had just changed hands again: Arthur Cumming and his Calgary-based group of investors had sold the company to Alfred March, President of March Shipping, Montreal. Medalta employees extended a somewhat wary welcome to the new owners, questioning whether

⁵ *Medicine Hat News*, July 9, 1947.

⁶ *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention*, September 23-29, 1946 (Toronto, Ontario), p. 89.

⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, July 9, 1947.

⁸ *Medicine Hat News*, July 16, 1947.

⁹ *The Call* (Calgary Trades and Labor Council), May 15, 1947.

¹⁰ W. Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1979) p.139.

"the new ownership [was] genuine in its intentions to make [Medalta Potteries] into an industry which [would] raise the living standards of workers in the city."¹¹

Medalta employees initially gave Mine-Mill a lukewarm reception: the CCL was reported to have the support of less than half the pottery workers. Mine-Mill increased its efforts. Barry McGuire was called back from Vancouver and William Longridge, the union's international representative for Alberta, came down from Edmonton. On May 22, Mine-Mill was certified at Medalta by a unanimous vote, and Longridge began contract negotiations on behalf of the company's employees on June 6.

The negotiations dragged on for weeks. At issue was the company's wage policy. Women were paid between 37.5 and 44 cents per hour, with piece work rates up to \$35 per week. Wages for men ranged from 55 to 70 cents per hour, with piece work rates up to 90 cents per hour.¹² The company offered a 7% increase across the board, which would have provided average rates of 43.5 cents for women and 67 cents for men.¹³ But the union demanded new hourly base rates of 50 cents for women and 70 cents for men.¹⁴ On July 28, the union finally rejected the company's offer.

After this point, things began to move more quickly. Union meetings which had initially attracted only about half of Medalta's staff now had over 200 in attendance. Talk centred more and more on threats of strike action. The union set up an office at Capitol Hall in Medicine Hat's downtown district, where employees set to work making picket signs before a strike vote was even called.¹⁵ Les Bogie, Mine-Mill's business agent, came to Medicine Hat from Trail, British Columbia where he had been working with the Smelters' Union.¹⁶ He issued a press release on August 2 stating that, as the company's offer had been unanimously rejected by the membership, the bargaining committee felt they had "no other recourse than to call a strike vote at the plant."¹⁷

MEDALTA GOES ON STRIKE

On August 12, Medalta's staff went on strike. Production was completely tied up by a sudden walkout of 250 employees. Workers arriving for the morning shift linked up with

¹¹Letter from William Longridge (Alberta representative of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers) and Clarence Sailer (chairman of Medalta's union) to the *Medicine Hat News*, October 11, 1947.

¹²Unemployment Insurance Commission: Report on Industrial Dispute, September 13, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

¹³Department of Labour, August 18, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

¹⁴*Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XX, No. 8 (August 1947) p.14.

¹⁵Interview with E. and R. Kessler (former Medalta employees), Medicine Hat, August 13, 1992.

¹⁶*Medicine Hat News* August 2, 1947.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

those just leaving the plant after the night shift. Together, they paraded down the main street of Medicine Hat and held a rally in Riverside Park. The strike vote held on August 2 was announced by union officials as "98% affirmative."¹⁸ But the vote had been unsupervised, making the walkout a "wildcat strike" under the industrial relations code. The province's industrial relations mediator, David Mathieson, announced the strike was illegal. Proper procedures were clearly laid out in the province's labour legislation: when negotiations broke down, the union should have applied to the Department of Labour for conciliation. Bogie was unperturbed. Ignoring Mathieson's comments, he warned that the union was prepared for a long strike should it prove necessary, and pointed out that off-shift workers from the Dominion Glass Company had joined Medalta's picket lines.¹⁹

Medalta fought back with a front-page advertisement inserted in the *Medicine Hat News*, notifying the striking workers they had been fired:

All persons who illegally absented themselves from their employment on August 12, 1947, are requested to call at the office of the company on Monday, August 18, to receive their wages in full up to and including the date of their severing connections with the company.²⁰



On August 12, Medalta's 250 employees walked off the job demanding higher wages. ("We Want Decent Wages": P4455-15, Glenbow Museum.)

¹⁸ *Medicine Hat News*, August 12, 1947.

¹⁹ *Medicine Hat News*, August 14, 1947.

²⁰ August 16, 1947.

Interested parties were invited to apply for positions at the plant. Neil German, counsel for Medalta's management, justified the drastic step by arguing the company was forced to regard the striking employees as "discharged personnel". The strike had been officially declared illegal, and yet union members had not returned to work. Medalta had no alternative but to conclude they had voluntarily left their employment. German mentioned in closing that the company would consider applications from the former employees as it reorganized its work program.²¹

Medalta had raised the stakes, and the union responded in kind. Longridge advised the press that the company's notice of dismissal had no effect on the strikers. He charged Medicine Hat industrialists with forming a conspiracy to smash labour.²² Bogie intensified the picket lines which had been in place since the strike was called. From their positions encircling the entrance to the plant, picketers moved down along the railway spur line. When a CPR train crew tried to move some rail cars on Medalta's line, they were obstructed by Bogie and fifty picketers who told them they were crossing a picket line and scabbing on CIO workers. Although no trouble was encountered, police supervision was requested to prevent any accidents.²³

"Tension Grows on City Strike Front," announced the *Medicine Hat News* on August 22. Justice Clinton B. Ford of the Supreme Court of Alberta granted an injunction to the company which restrained the strikers "from picketing, distributing handbills, or causing any act injurious to the company's business." Local police magistrate T. Gore-Hickman was forced into an abrupt about-face. He had stated in police court that orderly picketing in an industrial dispute was a legal right of the worker. However, he changed his comments after receiving a copy of the injunction, explaining that employee rights only had to be respected in the case of "normal" strikes. "Any picketing now would be a breach of law," he concluded, "and held in contempt of the Supreme Court of Alberta."²⁴

Medalta moved swiftly once it had the support of the justice system. The company filed claim for damages in the amount of \$10,000 and laid charges against ten of its former workers. Most were accused of intimidation and obstruction, but two were accused of physical violence. William Longridge and Paul Pasternak were charged with laying hands on Conrad Ruppert, a non-union employee, in an effort to dissuade him from returning to work. Gore-Hickman warned Longridge that he would tolerate "no rough stuff" on the picket line, and would deal severely with any efforts to disrupt the company's work plan. He informed both sides to the dispute that while picketers could try to induce others to join them, under no circumstances could they use intimidation.²⁵ The two were convicted on charges of assault and fined \$20 each.²⁶

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Medicine Hat News*, August 18, 1947.

²³ *Medicine Hat News*, August 19, 1947.

²⁴ *Medicine Hat News*, August 22, 1947.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Medicine Hat News*, August 29, 1947.

The striking workers began to feel there would not be an early adjustment of their difficulties. Married men on strike were eligible to file claims for insurance benefits, although the majority of them found other work. Some started at construction jobs in the city or harvest work in the surrounding farms; others took factory jobs at canning plants in the nearby communities of Brooks and Taber. CIO unions paid no strike wage, and their relief fund was available only in cases of extreme need. Longridge began holding collections at union labour rallies, and scheduled a public fund raising drive which generated over \$475. Grateful union members placed a notice in the *Medicine Hat News* thanking the citizens of Medicine Hat for the "splendid support" given to the Medalta strikers, and concluded triumphantly, "WITH SUCH SUPPORT THE PEOPLE WILL WIN."²⁷ Meanwhile, Medalta's owners also made preparations for a long dispute. The company resumed production with a skeleton crew comprised mainly of supervisory staff. For the longer term, it filed orders for skilled and unskilled labour with the government employment agency.²⁸

Medalta continued to pursue its course of legal action against the union. On September 5, Justice Clinton Ford found Les Bogie and Albert Pawlowski guilty of contempt of court. The two were convicted for ignoring the injunction which prohibited picketing at the Medalta plant. Ford stopped short of sending them to jail, and instead levied severe fines of \$100 against Bogie and \$50 against Pawlowski. Ford was determined to set a penalty "sufficiently heavy to impress [the strikers] that this court intends to carry out its orders."²⁹ The union retaliated with a large labour rally in Capitol Hall that evening. Addressing the crowd was William Mason, an executive member of Mine-Mill from Butte, Montana. Mason was in Medicine Hat for the weekend to discuss the strike issues with union officers, and to offer any assistance he could in helping them reach an agreement with Medalta. He blamed the situation on Medicine Hat's sadly inadequate wage scale and antiquated anti-union attitudes, and promised that "all the resources of our hundreds of locals will be behind the pottery workers."³⁰

UNION MEMBERSHIP AT A CROSSROADS ♦

Despite the encouragement and support of Mine-Mill's executive, the strikers began to lose their momentum from this point. Following the weekend planning session with William Mason, local leaders began to take charge. Clarence Sailer, head of Medalta's union and Medicine Hat Alderman Edwin Horne went to Edmonton to seek government

²⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, September 11, 1947.

²⁸ *Medicine Hat News*, August 22, 1947.

²⁹ *Medicine Hat News*, September 6, 1947.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

intervention in the dispute.³¹ David Mathieson, provincial mediator, flew to Medicine Hat to meet with union and management representatives. After three days he returned to Edmonton, declaring the attempt a failure.³² The company held to its position that the strikers were discharged personnel and would have to re-apply for employment. Furthermore, they contended that not all former employees would be accepted.

The union countered that all strikers would have to be reinstated as a unit without discrimination, and that this could not happen until a tentative agreement on wages was reached. The union lowered its demands from 50 cents to 42 cents for women, which was the legislated minimum wage for female employees in Alberta; men's wages they reduced from 70 cents to 68 cents.³³ It is interesting to note that the company's original offer, rejected by the union on July 28, provided rates as high as 47 cents for women and 75 cents for men.³⁴ The workers began feeling bitter as they counted up the lost wages which would have been earned and enjoyed if the union had simply continued negotiations.³⁵ But regardless of how the workers felt, one federal government observer was certain the CIO was determined to maintain a hard line:

It is our opinion that many of the workers would like to be drawing their pay cheques while negotiations are being conducted and there are others who would return to work but are afraid of the criticism they would receive from their fellow workers. Our discussions and other sources of information led us to form the opinion that this is going to be a show down between the industry and the CIO in Medicine Hat.³⁶

The strikers became more desperate. They waylaid a truck hauling crocks out of the plant and smashed the goods it was carrying. They pitched rocks through windows in the homes of scab labourers. In the most violent outbreak, workers were mauled as they tried to cross the picket line to get into the plant. One man was thrown to the ground and kicked, others were pulled out of cars, knocked down and pummelled with fists and sticks.³⁷ And in a final bid to unnerve their opposition, a hand-lettered note was sent to the company's lawyer:

³¹ *Medicine Hat News*, September 9, 1947.

³² *Medicine Hat News*, September 13, 1947.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Department of Labour, August 18, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

³⁵ J.W. McLane, Manager, National Employment Service to Director, Board of Industrial Relations, Department of Labour, September 30, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

³⁶ J.W. McLane to Director, Board of Industrial Relations, Department of Labour, September 15, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

³⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, September 29, 1947.

Give you time to settle or get out city by 12 p.m. Saturday Oct. 18. If you fail will have a liberty over your dead body or a ransom for return.³⁸

Whatever the strikers hoped to accomplish through these tactics, they certainly lost in terms of public relations.

These [violent] incidents... are having an adverse effect on the attitude of the public and while public sentiment may not be entirely with the company, the worker is losing local sympathy.³⁹

J. A. Cunliffe, manager of Medalta, filed charges against seven men and eight women involved in the assaults.⁴⁰ Beyond punishing the individual strikers, the company moved decisively to crush the union. Medalta filed an application with the Supreme Court of Alberta to cancel the union's certification, render the Local at Medalta an "unauthorized bargaining agent," and brand the strike as illegal.⁴¹ Hearings were to commence on October 4, and it was anticipated the court room would be taxed to capacity.⁴²

JAIL TERMS FOR THE STRIKERS

On October 11, the fifteen Medalta picketers pleaded guilty. Magistrate Gore-Hickman sentenced seven men to one month hard labour to be served in the jail at Lethbridge, about 175 kilometres west of Medicine Hat. The youngest was Valentine Stach at 19, and the oldest was Matthew Wolfer at 65. Gore-Hickman said he was reluctant to give jail terms to the eight young women, most of whom were between 17 and 18 years of age, and instead gave them suspended sentences.

In his remarks, the judge betrayed a decided sympathy towards the company in condemning the union's acts of violence. The charges against the strikers were for the serious offence of instigating, and the lesser offence of aiding and abetting; however, Gore-Hickman made no differentiation in the sentence. He explained that "acts of assault committed by groups of persons threw guilt on all taking part, whether they were the actual ones who committed the act or not." Yet one of the defendants was given a suspended sentence on the strength of the fact that he had been in communication with company officials and promised to return to work. Albert Pawlowski said he had been forced against his will to take part in the disturbances. The judge made a special exception for

³⁸ *Moose Jaw Times-Herald* October 11, 1947.

³⁹ J. W. McLane, September 30, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

⁴⁰ *Medicine Hat News*, October 1, 1947.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Medicine Hat News*, October 3, 1947.

Pawlowski, supported by the crown, stating his comments showed that "all the defendants were not as guilty as others."⁴³

The union seemed unprepared for the court's severity. Joseph Cohen, lawyer for the defense, had suggested the incidents were typical of any picket line. In previous court hearings, although the company had consistently won, penalties against the strikers had amounted to fines and court costs. But this was different. Gore-Hickman's prison sentence created "a reaction of silent shock in the court room."⁴⁴ Strikers present for the proceedings watched in dismay as Mounties handcuffed the men and escorted them out.

The union made a last effort to salvage the situation, but matters only went from bad to worse. A Labor Defence Committee was quickly struck to rally the union's resources. It claimed that the sentences handed down by Magistrate Gore-Hickman were "unjustified" and called for the release of the seven men. A protest meeting was held at the Empress Theatre with about 500 people in attendance. Guest speakers declared their protests, not against the convictions, but against the severity of the sentences. Petitions addressed to Attorney-General Lucien Maynard were circulated, asking him to approach the federal Minister of Justice to have the sentence reduced.⁴⁵ A special delegation approached City Council, asking it to support the union's appeal to the Attorney-General.⁴⁶ But Council reacted harshly. Mayor William Rae read a prepared statement, which was printed almost word for word in the next morning's *Medicine Hat News*. An arresting headline on the front page proclaimed: "Rae Charges Red Agent, Moscow Gold Backing Labor Strife Here."⁴⁷

Rae spelled out in no uncertain terms that the union's efforts were part of a Communist plot. He spoke of the union's sinister purpose in preparing a "calculated plan designed to make capital out of human misery." The appeal was "a dastardly scheme" to manipulate Council members into a position where they were "forced to damn the foes of Bolshevism or be themselves damned." He saved his choicest words for a personal attack on Longridge, calling him "an individual with a deformed brain, a misfit, who admits receiving the gold of Moscow."⁴⁸ Rae was careful to distance his remarks from the strikers themselves, whom he described as innocent and misguided. He contended that if the convicted strikers wished to question the sentence given by Gore-Hickman, they had a legal right to protest and appeal their sentence through the proper channels, provided by the courts of Canada. He objected to the union's assumption that Council could be persuaded to act on its behalf. As one of the Aldermen stated, "We were all elected to

⁴³ *Medicine Hat News*, October 11, 1947.

⁴⁴ Interview with E. Kessler (former Medalta employee), Medicine Hat, August 13, 1992.

⁴⁵ *Medicine Hat News*, October 16, 17 and 20, 1947.

⁴⁶ City Council Minutes, October 20, 1947.

⁴⁷ *Medicine Hat News*, October 21, 1947.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

attend to the business and business alone, of this City, and not to butt into matters pertaining to either the Provincial or Federal Governments."⁴⁹

Popular opinion sided with Rae. City council was not empowered to interfere with the administration of justice, stated the Editor of the *Calgary Herald*, especially on behalf of a group of law-breakers:

Certain labor leaders seem to have the impression that trades unions should enjoy special privileges under the law. Violence is, apparently, not a breach of the statutes if done by members of a union.⁵⁰

The Editor of the *Medicine Hat News* concurred: "Individually the councillors may have been sympathetic [to the workers] but as a law-making body the Council has the duty of upholding the law."⁵¹

DEFEAT FOR MINE-MILL

The union rapidly crumbled after Longridge's unsuccessful appeal to Council. On October 22, after defying the Supreme Court injunction against picketing for two months, the union called off its picket lines. The next day, the Supreme Court hearing on the legality of the strike began. Less than twenty spectators showed up. That same night, union representatives and company officials came to an agreement. The strike was called off, and the company agreed to re-engage its former workers. However, workers were to be taken back gradually at the company's discretion, and seniority would apply only if the company chose to reinstate it. Former workers were given until November 7 to re-apply in writing for their positions. Mine-Mill capitulated on all counts:

There is no question but that the Union lost strength as the strike continued and the calling off of the strike was a complete collapse from their stand point. It could be termed 'unconditional surrender' as there were no conditions attached to the calling off of the strike though it was mutually agreed that as little publicity as possible would be given the matter.⁵²

Medalta's owners and managers immediately focused their attention on recouping the company's losses. Eighteen employees returned to work on Friday, October 24 after

⁴⁹City Council Minutes, October 20, 1947.

⁵⁰Editorial, "Medicine Hat Council Was Right," *Calgary Herald*, October 22, 1947.

⁵¹Editorial, "Wrong Idea," *Medicine Hat News*, October 22, 1947.

⁵²J.W. McLane to Head Office, Unemployment Insurance Commission, Ottawa, October 25, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

72 days on strike. By October 28 staff levels had risen to 65, where they would remain until operations were better organized. Manufacturing was initially limited to the white-ware lines: other lines were not scheduled for production until the plant was running smoothly again.⁵³ The company's main objective was to get back into maximum production as quickly as possible, a task which was estimated to require between three and six months.⁵⁴ Even then, management estimated the payroll would not exceed 150, as compared to the 250 on staff before the strike.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the seven jailed strikers were released after 27 days in prison: three days were remitted for good behaviour. A special dinner and dance reception was held for them following their return to Medicine Hat. Les Bogie and William Longridge attended, along with local alderman Edwin Horne. After a dinner of baked ham and mashed potatoes, the evening's ceremonies began. The seven men were hailed as "Labour Heroes," and presented with cigarette lighters on behalf of the union. Clarence Sailer, one of the convicted strikers, gave a speech describing life in the Lethbridge jail. He said the men were well-treated, spending each day on chores in the boiler room, laundry, vegetable garden, or local beet fields. He noted humorously that the dinner was a welcome change from the previous month's fare: "We appreciate everything, except the carrots and turnips, because we certainly got our fill of those in Lethbridge."⁵⁶

Les Bogie, William Longridge, and Edwin Horne, the other speakers for the evening, gave more political presentations. Their speeches toasted the growth of the trade union movement in Medicine Hat, with quotes from Lenin and visions of worker-owned industries. Longridge urged those present that the fight for better working standards would continue. But his words sounded tired and pat:

Some will say the Medalta strike was a defeat for the union. This is far from the truth. You can't stop the growth of the trade union movement. The struggle was not in vain, and our union will eventually become one of the strongest in Western Canada.⁵⁷

The evening closed to the strains of the Medicine Hat Nighthawks playing popular dance tunes. Thus ended the longest and most bitter labour dispute in Medicine Hat's history.

⁵³ *Medicine Hat News*, October 28, 1947.

⁵⁴ J.W. McLane, Manager, National Employment Service to Head Office, Unemployment Insurance Commission, Ottawa, October 25, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

⁵⁵ Unemployment Insurance Commission: Report on Industrial Dispute, October 24, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

⁵⁶ *Medicine Hat News*, November 7, 1947.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

A final echo of the strike sounded through the 1947 civic election. In a surprise move, Edwin Horne put his name forward as a mayoralty candidate in mid-November. He drew together a labour slate, appealing for a 'workingman's council' for 1948. His support for the Medalta strikers was well known, and he had frequently used the workers' grievances as a platform to voice his own political views. Clarence Sailer, one of his candidates, signified the support of local pottery workers for his campaign.⁵⁸ Horne faced off against the incumbent mayor, William Rae, who had earned the title of "Red Dragon Jouster" during the strike. Battle lines were clearly drawn and, as the *Medicine Hat News* pointed out, "the coming election will hold an endless interest for local citizens and the outcome will be, if not even, very, very hot."⁵⁹ On December 8, a record number of voters turned out and re-elected Rae on a "tidal wave" which inundated the Labor bid for power. After six months in the news, Medalta's labour struggles finally left the spotlight.

Mine-Mill's complete failure in Medicine Hat foreshadowed graver troubles for the organization. Despite Longridge's stock prediction about the union's future in western Canada, the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers was virtually crushed in the two years following the Medalta strike. In 1948 it was suspended from its parent organization, the Canadian Congress of Labour, on charges of taking control of local unions for their own purposes, and "selling the rank and file down the river."⁶⁰ A CCL committee struck to investigate Mine-Mill found that its policies and activities were "consistently directed toward the achievement of the program and the purposes of the Communist Party."⁶¹ In 1949, Mine-Mill was expelled from the CCL.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The strike at Medalta Potteries was an important and influential event. While its consequences were felt most keenly by the strikers themselves, the dispute rippled through the community of Medicine Hat and on through the province of Alberta. It affected the fate of Mine-Mill organizers, and lay behind important provincial labour legislation.

The most immediate impact of the strike was on the financial well-being of the striking workers, all of whom were either machine operators or general unskilled labour. Office staff, foremen and technical workers did not participate.⁶² A total of 124 men and

⁵⁸ *Medicine Hat News*, November 17, 1947.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Canadian Congress of Labour, *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention*, October 11-15, 1948 (Toronto, Ontario).

⁶¹ Congress of Industrial Organizations, *Report of the Committee to Investigate Charges Against the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers*, 1949.

⁶² Unemployment Insurance Commission: Report on Industrial Dispute, September 13, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

89 women remained off the job in protest for 72 days. There was no strike fund to cover their living expenses over that period. Some were able to find other employment on a temporary basis but many were left in a position of financial hardship.

The strike clearly affected the economic health of the company as well. Production was crippled when pottery workers walked out on August 12. By August 22, supervisory staff were put on the machines in an effort to keep the kilns operating, and the company attempted to recruit additional production staff. It was not until the middle of October that the tunnel kiln was reported to be in full operation, and shipments were resumed on a limited scale. When the strike ended, it took six months before the factory could absorb the workforce it had previously employed.

The community of Medicine Hat was almost pulled apart by the strike. Local people were affected on a daily basis, whether by reading the newspaper or by coming in contact with the strikers. Railway workers were subjected to verbal abuse, a truck from Black's hardware store was mobbed, scab labourers were bullied and attacked. Workers and management exchanged accusations, asking the community to take sides in the dispute. Open letters from both sides were published in the *Medicine Hat News*, each claiming to present the true facts and correct the "misrepresentations" of the other. In the end, a civic election was fought over the strike at Medalta Potteries, with candidates who had aligned themselves with labour during the dispute opposing those who had supported management.

Outside Medicine Hat, there was widespread interest in the strike. Reports on the strikers, and particularly the incidents on the picket line, were carried by the *Lethbridge Herald*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Bulletin*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Moose Jaw Times-Herald*, *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, and *Windsor Star*, as well as local union papers in Alberta and British Columbia.⁶³

When the strike is placed in a broader perspective, it appears that the labour unrest in Medalta Potteries was to some extent manufactured. The strikers made it very clear from the start that their contest with management was over wages. They wanted to be paid more money. Yet new minimum wage legislation for Alberta had just gone into effect in June 1947. At the same time, the average wage in the Canadian clay products industry rose sharply in 1947 to almost \$35 per week – an increase of 18% over 1946.⁶⁴ It would seem that wages were not in very bad shape to begin with. Moreover, management had offered an increase of 7% prior to the strike which the union rejected out of hand. Yet, as discussed earlier, by September 13 the union was prepared to accept less than that just to allow the strikers to return to work.

As the strike progressed, the central issue shifted from wages to solidarity. Despite the strikers' original motive of obtaining more money, and the union leaders consistent criticisms of Medicine Hat as a low-wage town, the subject of money dropped from the union agenda by September 15. By that time, the company had made it clear that not all

⁶³NAC, Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154.

⁶⁴*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XXI, No. 8 (August 1948) p.2.

former employees would be accepted back at the plant. The only point which the union insisted on was that all strikers would be returned to work without discrimination.⁶⁵ The union which had promised to improve the workers' conditions had ended by jeopardizing their livelihoods. The entire impetus of the dispute shifted: workers ended up simply demanding a return to the conditions which prevailed before the strike was called – namely, that all of them could have their jobs back again.

Medalta employees had not considered union membership a pressing issue before the strike. In fact, they were relatively uninterested: one union organizer stated that quite a number of the staff "did not want anything to do with this union as they have not profited much by it to date."⁶⁶ The workers' interest in Mine-Mill was limited to what they perceived the union could do for them. And if they had little concern for Mine-Mill's broader agenda to begin with, they had even less after the strike was defeated. "The union is still in operation," noted a government observer once Medalta employees had returned to work, "[but] we doubt whether it will have much strength for some time to come as the majority of the workers feel badly let down."⁶⁷

By aligning their interests even superficially with Mine-Mill, the Medalta strikers created a political context for their actions. This context could not have been calculated to draw stronger opposition. The company did not want to be dictated to by professional union organizers, and rallied its resources fiercely to protect against Mine-Mill's intrusion. Moreover, the company had government support: response to the strike at both the municipal and provincial levels was to crush the union. Politicians were motivated by fears of Communist infiltration. William D. Wylie, Social Credit MP for Medicine Hat, stated that Communist leaders were resorting to strikes in an effort to destroy democratic government in Canada. He singled out the CIO in particular, holding them responsible for the country's industrial strife. To bring his points closer to home, he concluded with the following anecdote:

Just the other day a man on strike in Medicine Hat approached me for work. I questioned him and he told me they are on strike 'because our leaders told us to go out.' Then he added: 'They should be kicked out and then we wouldn't have this trouble.'⁶⁸

William Rae, Mayor of Medicine Hat, earned the title of "Red Dragon Jousting" for his outspoken attacks on William Longridge as a Communist agent. He accused

⁶⁵Letter from Clarence Sailer printed in the *Medicine Hat News*, September 15, 1947.

⁶⁶W.S. Ratcliffe to G.C. Cushing, Secretary, Trades and Labour Congress; printed in *The Call* (Calgary Trades and Labour Council) May 15, 1947.

⁶⁷J.W. McLane to Head Office, Unemployment Insurance Commission, Ottawa, October 25, 1947 (NAC Department of Labour RG 27, Vol. 456, Strike 154).

⁶⁸*Medicine Hat News* September 30, 1947.

Longridge and his Moscow friends of using the Medalta strike to create heroes and martyrs for Soviet Canada.⁶⁹

No particular concern for workers' rights or demands was expressed, other than by politicians with a declared labour affiliation. Alderman Edwin Horne was one of the few to speak out on behalf of the strikers. He claimed the pottery workers were fighting on behalf of Medicine Hat's industrial workers for a decent standard of living. However, their efforts were impeded:

Surrounded by a web of legal devices which seeks to rob them of their rights – hampered by a labour act which makes bargaining a farce if the employer does not wish to bargain and with no assistance from an indifferent provincial government – these workers are being branded as criminals for fighting for what is morally right.⁷⁰

The Alberta government under Social Credit Premier Ernest Manning was very pro-business. Government policy was designed to encourage manufacturing and increase employment as far as possible.⁷¹ As a government advertisement in *The Canadian Unionist* for August of 1947 stated, labour legislation in Alberta was “directed to stability in industry.”⁷² Just one month before the Medalta strike Dr. John L. Robinson, MLA for Medicine Hat and Minister of Labour, said:

He was proud to say that Alberta has had the least labour troubles of any province in the Dominion. This, he thought, gave a very good illustration of the need of thinking twice before using the strike method to enforce demands.⁷³

The Medalta strike, with its injunctions, police escorts, violence and imprisonments, called this peaceful vision into question. In response to the stand-off between Mine-Mill and Medalta, the provincial government set severe penalties for unions involved in illegal strikes. Legislation was enacted stating that in the event of an illegal strike, the contract between the union and the employer was automatically declared void. The Social Credit government prided itself on maintaining industrial peace, and was determined to prevent a situation like the Medalta strike from ever recurring.⁷⁴

⁶⁹City Council Minutes, October 20, 1947.

⁷⁰*Medicine Hat News* October 10, 1947.

⁷¹Chairman, Board of Industrial Relations to GB Armstrong, March 19, 1940 (PAA 69.131/2014-2032).

⁷²Vol. XXI, No. 8 (August 1947), p. 177.

⁷³*Medicine Hat News*, June 19, 1947.

⁷⁴W. Caragata, *op. cit.* P.141.

CHAPTER 10

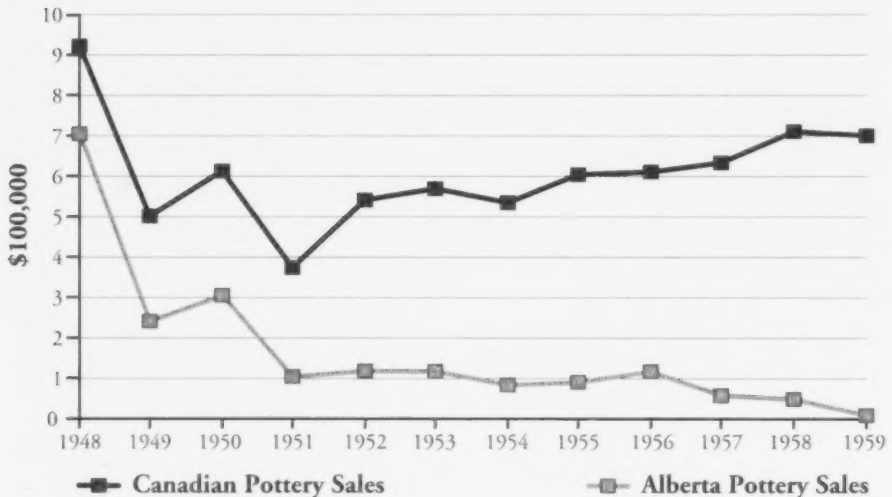
STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL

"What is happening to the pottery industry of Canada?" asked the *Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* in consternation.¹ The year was 1950. Sales reported for the previous year had seen a crippling drop of 46% to just over \$500,000. Meanwhile imports had increased by almost one million dollars to a total exceeding \$13 million.² Higher imports, decreased sales and increased labour costs ended the artificial boost that wartime conditions had given the Canadian pottery industry. Potteries were forced to close down, unable to compete with inexpensive wares imported from England, Europe, and Japan:

If you go into any china or gift shop you will find the stock divided as follows:
– from 30 to 40% English goods, not more than 10% Canadian, and the remaining 50% foreign.³

The next year, 1951, saw pottery sales plummet to the lowest levels reported since the Depression. The chart below (Figure 11) shows the demise of the post-war boom,

Figure 11
Pottery Sales, 1948-1959



¹ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXIII, No. 5 (May 1950) p.4.

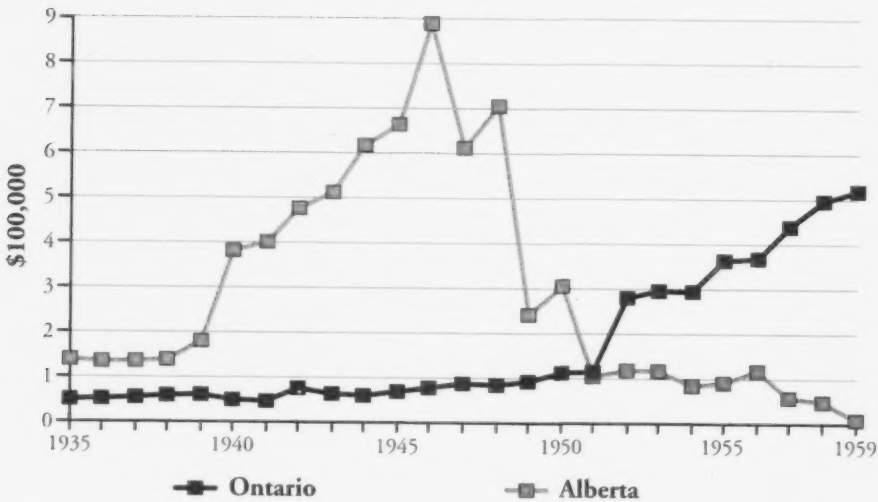
² *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada, 1950*. Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa 1951).

³ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXIII, No. 5 (May 1950) p.4.

clearly more devastating for Alberta than for the rest of the country. By 1959, potteries in Medicine Hat had plunged to a mere 1% of their peak wartime production.

Federal statistics on the Canadian pottery industry were broken down by province from 1935 until 1959. Pottery-manufacturing provinces included New Brunswick, Québec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Between 1935 and 1950, pottery production was dominated by Alberta, with the other provinces lingering beneath \$150,000 in annual sales. After 1951, Ontario overtook Alberta. In fact, the recovery of the Canadian pottery industry indicated in Figure 11 was localized to Ontario. A comparison of pottery production figures for Ontario and Alberta in this period (Figure 12) clarifies the overall picture.

Figure 12
Pottery Production in Ontario and Alberta, 1935-1959



Pottery production continued to rise throughout the following decade, reaching over \$2 million by 1968.⁴ But Alberta was not part of this picture. It never regained a foothold in the industry, although several companies attempted to resuscitate the manufacture of household pottery items on a much smaller scale of production. The year 1950 had ushered in a decade of change for Canadian pottery manufacturers, and Medicine Hat was towed under:

⁴ *Clay Products Manufacturers (Domestic)*. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Industry and Merchandising Division (Ottawa, 1970).

The pottery picture has been one of ups and downs. The number of small firms has increased and there has been a greater interest in ceramics as a hobby. Foreign competition hurt many establishments. Some did not survive but others, changing to different lines of ware, have met with fair success.⁵

The pottery industry in Medicine Hat was undermined by several factors. The lengthy labour disputes of 1947 came at a critical time when companies could not afford any setbacks in production. An unanticipated hike in the cost of Saskatchewan clays contributed to significantly higher manufacturing costs. Competition from imported pottery jeopardized local production, forcing plant closures in Redcliff and Medicine Hat. In addition to these external factors, there were internal considerations as well. Each plant saw changes in its management and product lines. In some cases, new ideas brought a reprieve for the troubled industry; in other cases, they proved devastating.

A CHANGE IN TIDE

The first indications of change in Medicine Hat's pottery industry began to surface in 1944. Wartime contracts had been lucrative for the potteries. However, plant owners knew that the business created by the war was artificial. The war years had brought wage controls, busy markets and government contracts. The future promised an end to all three. First Arthur Cumming, and later Hop Yuill began making quiet plans to get out while the going was good.

In 1944, a circular letter was sent to Medalta's bondholders and shareholders offering to purchase their holdings in the company. Predicting a downturn in the company's fortunes, the letter encouraged them to sell. The price offered was \$100 cash for each bond, and for each unit of six common shares.

The company has benefitted from the war, but now increased taxes and wages with ceiling prices, make business more difficult. After the war there will be renewed competition. Your directors, therefore, feel that you will probably wish to accept this offer.⁶

By January 1945, over 70% of the Bonds and Common Shares were redeemed, and Cumming set to work to round up the rest. With personal letters, telephone calls, and even a trip to Vancouver, he tried to persuade the remaining shareholders to sell out. His tactics were sufficiently overbearing that one shareholder actually complained to the

⁵ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (January 1951), p.17.

⁶ R.G. Smith, Medalta Potteries Ltd., Calgary to the Bondholders and Shareholders of Medalta Potteries Ltd., December 15, 1944 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

Registrar of Companies for Alberta that the company should be investigated.⁷ It seems clear that Cumming was trying to accumulate as large a share of Medalta as he could before selling it to an outside party. Given that Cumming had taken over the company's leadership in the Depression, he had likely never imagined that Medalta's accounts could look as good as they did in the mid-1940s. Cumming found a buyer in the summer of 1947: Alfred March, President of March Shipping in Montreal.

At the same time, Hop Yuill began looking for prospective buyers. Medicine Hat Potteries had weathered the immediate post-war period quite profitably but Yuill must have foreseen that the future was, in Ed Phillipson's words, rather gloomy. Yuill put together an appealing package in 1947, offering both potteries (Medicine Hat Potteries and Alberta Potteries in Redcliff) and distributing firms (Medicine Hat Potteries Ltd. in Toronto and Ceramic Sales Ltd. in Québec) for a total of \$800,000. The deal included the two manufacturing properties, with their factories, equipment and inventories, and a total share of the interest in the distributing firms.⁸ His offer was considered by two concerns, with a third waiting in the wings if the first two fell through. The package did not sell in the end, and Yuill retained his ownership.

As it turned out, 1947 was a critical year for Medicine Hat's pottery industry. Labour unrest broke out in a rash of strikes at Medicine Hat Potteries, Alberta Clay Products, Medalta Potteries, and Medicine Hat Brick & Tile. The impact on productivity and sales was significant. Then, just when the potteries could least afford the competition, British potteries mounted an aggressive marketing campaign in Canada, drawing on wartime patriotism to win sales. Advertisements placed in journals like *Western Business and Industry* admonished readers to "BUY BRITISH":

Specify English vitrified hotel crockery for your catering department. We maintain open stocks for immediate delivery from the world's largest and best potteries for hotel, camp, industrial, hospital and steamship use.⁹

As British imports began to rise, Canadian potteries suffered dramatically. Sovereign Potteries in Hamilton was swallowed up by Johnson Brothers, largest manufacturers of

⁷William Geldard complained that he was virtually coerced into selling his shares. "After being high pressured by letters asking me to turn in my shares and that I was taking a chance of getting less or nothing out of them eventually I sold out at the offered price." He later thought the shares were worth more than he received, and became suspicious of Cumming's motives in encouraging him to sell. [W.L. Geldard, Vancouver to Registrar of Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, June 6, 1946 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).]

⁸J.H. Yuill to N.E. Munson, Winnipeg, December 8, 1947 (CPIC, Yuill Papers).

⁹From an advertisement "published in the interests of the people of British Columbia by Buscombe & Co. Ltd., Vancouver, Wholesalers and Importers of Crockery, Glassware and Silverware" *Western Business and Industry* Vol. 21, No. 2 (February 1947) p.101.

table ware in the British Empire.¹⁰ Alberta Potteries in Redcliff was actually forced to close, as its wares were priced out of the market:

With the return of British lines to the export market the management has found it impossible to meet the price competition. This is said to be due to higher Canadian labor and raw material costs as well as inefficient production.¹¹

Alberta Potteries' production costs were described as "already on the uneconomic borderline," partly as the result of a new royalty levied on Saskatchewan clay. Most of the plant's twenty employees were thrown out of work, with a skeleton crew retained for maintenance and clean-up.

The Saskatchewan government introduced a change in its policy and pricing to protect non-renewable resources in October, 1947. A new royalty levy was adopted by the CCF on clay produced in Saskatchewan. This translated into a cost increase significant enough to force both Medicine Hat Potteries and Medalta to seek new sources of supply. Saskatchewan clay, which the potteries had obtained at \$2 per ton was subject to a taxation schedule ranging from \$1 to \$11 per ton. Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries together used from 3,000 to 10,000 tons of high-grade clay annually, which meant a gross increase in costs of between \$20,000 and \$35,000 a year.¹²

Not all the news in 1947 was bad for the clay products industry. Arthur Cumming decided to reinvest the money he had made in selling Medalta, and approached Ed Phillipson about setting up a plant dedicated to manufacturing electrical porcelain. Both Cumming and Phillipson had previously explored the possibility of making insulators at Medalta. However, lacking the proper clays and equipment, they had never developed anything more than a "crude and imperfect" product which resulted in a total loss for the company.¹³ Phillipson told Cumming at the time:

To make this line profitable, and reputable, we would need first of all a special body highly resistant to electric shock, even when used at low voltages. Insulators require special handling in manufacture, drying, and particularly entirely a different way of burning than our stoneware burn... To manufacture such items as insulators, spark plugs, and electrical goods special machines are required.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Hamilton Spectator* June 27, 1947.

¹¹ *Medicine Hat News* November 6, 1947.

¹² *Calgary Herald* October 8, 1947, p.10.

¹³ Medalta Potteries Ltd., Medicine Hat to Calgary, April 22, 1938 (PAA 69.235/375).

¹⁴ *Ibid*

While Phillipson did try to make insulators out of the clay he developed for hotel china, his experiments were overtaken by orders for table ware.¹⁵ However, the immediate post-war years saw a growing demand for low-tension electrical insulators, partly as a result of rural electrification which was going on throughout the prairie provinces.¹⁶ Phillipson and Cumming decided to try again, this time using porcelain clay imported from the United States. They set up a branch plant in Medicine Hat for National Porcelain, headquartered in Winnipeg.¹⁷ M.L. Pozzi was hired to manage the company.¹⁸ W.G. Worcester, Phillipson's former professor, assisted with testing the manufacturing process developed by Phillipson. He commented on the new company's "novel and interesting procedure" for forming ware by spinning the units in steel dies.¹⁹

National Porcelain was not the only company to focus on new operating processes. Plant modernization was a priority for Medicine Hat's clay products industry in 1947 in the brick yards, pipe plants and potteries. Tunnel kilns and drying systems were installed, forming practices were improved, and efforts were made to improve the industry's general efficiency and control of production.²⁰

MEDALTA'S FINAL STRUGGLE

Alfred March, Medalta's new owner, took over the company in the summer of 1947 and began organizing for production. His first move was to appoint his brother-in-law, Edgar Janes, as Managing Director of the company. Janes had previous experience in manufacturing, having headed up a powdered egg facility in Saskatoon. Jack Cunliffe, son of Medalta's Vancouver distributor Ben Cunliffe, became plant manager and Ed Phillipson was added to the Board of Directors.²¹ Despite the collective talents of the new management group, Medalta itself must have seemed like a sinking ship. A string of disasters hit the beleaguered plant. Shortly after March bought the company in 1947,

¹⁵Medicine Hat to Calgary, October 15, 1938 (PAA 69.235/379).

¹⁶Interview between E.G. Phillipson and L. Simpson, in *Medalta Potteries Conservation Report*, August 1993 prepared by Simpson Roberts Wappell.

¹⁷A report on union organization in *The Call* described "a new plant started up [in Medicine Hat] that is making electrical insulators that employs around 40 to 50 workers... [It] has its headquarters in Winnipeg, and is under Local 147" (May 15, 1947).

¹⁸*Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XX, No. 8 (August 1947), p.14.

¹⁹"Cooperative Tests for National Porcelain, Ltd." ca. 1948 (U of S Archives MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

²⁰J.C. Phillips, "Clays and Clay Products, 1948," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXII, No. 10 (October 1949) p.7.

²¹*The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXI, No. 6 (June 1948) p.9; *Medicine Hat News* September 29, 1947; Medalta Potteries Ltd. Annual Statement, December 31, 1948 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

his employees went out on the longest strike in Medicine Hat's history. In 1948, Medalta registered a net loss of over \$43,000.²² A devastating plant closure in 1949 made the pages of *Time* magazine. Devaluation of the British pound saw prices for imported pottery drop so drastically that English wares sold in Canada at prices below the cost of production in Medicine Hat. Medalta was forced out of business in November after a three-month struggle:

Only three months ago Medalta was riding high. It had a fat backlog of orders and had spent \$200,000 for expansion and new equipment to turn out its soup plates, cups and saucers. Though devaluation of the Canadian dollar hiked the cost of imported US clay and flint by 10%, Managing Director Edgar Janes was sure Medalta could absorb the increase. But [when] the jobbers began quoting British china at 20% to 25% below the going price, Medalta was caught. Customers cancelled orders wholesale.²³

The closure put the company's 280 employees on the streets. The unemployed workers accounted for nearly 10% of Medicine Hat's labour force, and their lost wages represented \$10,000 per week to the city's economy – a loss quickly felt by local retail businesses.²⁴ Union representatives presented a resolution to City Council, pointing out the economic hardships Medicine Hat would endure with the closing of its pottery industry. The union suggested City Council should petition the federal government for protection against unfair competition. Council members were requested to go to Ottawa in person "to impress upon the government the seriousness of the situation."²⁵

The Prime Minister's Office, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Labour were all alerted to the crisis. Senator F. W. Gershaw investigated the issue, as did John Robinson, provincial labour minister.²⁶ Essentially, the politicians adopted a "wait-and-see" approach, based on several hopeful features which they felt would see the situation resolve itself without their interference. Ocean shipping rates were likely to be increased; the British government was trying to get ceramic manufacturers to increase their prices; and imports from the US had declined as a result of the currency devaluation. Moreover, the Hamilton pottery had decided to do nothing for five or six weeks until it became clear how the devaluation really affected them.²⁷

In fact, British prices did not go up for over a year. In November 1950, revised electrical charges in Britain caused production costs to rise by 15 to 20%. A large proportion of

²²Medalta Potteries Balance Sheet, December 31, 1948 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

²³Article from *Time* magazine quoted in *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXII, No. 11 (November 1949) p.13.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵City Council Minutes, October 28, 1949.

²⁶City Council Minutes, November 7, 1949.

²⁷City Council Minutes, Special Meeting, November 14, 1949.

potteries used electric kilns. Manufacturers could no longer absorb the increased costs, and began reflecting them in higher prices to consumers.²⁸ But Medicine Hat's troubles were still not over. This time it was the Medicine Hat Potteries which shut down, due to a sharp decrease in demand. The doors officially closed on December 11, 1950. Plant workers complained to John Robinson, Minister of Industries and Labour, that the company had given them no assurance they could return to work: "This affects approximately 80 employees and their families, and certainly indicates the need for an investigation into the Pottery Industry in this province."²⁹ In the end, the pottery resumed operations in January 1951, after closing down for four weeks.³⁰

Hop Yuill once again began looking for a way to get out of the pottery business. The company had tried to rejuvenate its product lines in 1949, supplementing its plain white semi-porcelain dinnerware with new shapes and more lustrous clay bodies.³¹ But Yuill wanted a change. He had resigned as President and Director of Ceramic Sales in 1950, and in 1951 he explored plans to convert the Medicine Hat Potteries into a "highly mechanized plant" for producing fire brick.³² Again, his plans failed to materialize.

Meanwhile, Medalta continued limping along. The company's balance sheet for 1952 registered a deficit account of almost \$42,000.³³ Early in 1953, March called a meeting of Medalta's directors in Montreal, with plans to take a tour of American pottery facilities. The group set out by car for New York state, but a late night, bad weather and snowy roads conspired against them with tragic results. Phillipson, who was riding with Fred March, his son Bobby March and Ed Janes, later recalled "I heard a horn and woke up." A truck hit the side of the car at 70 miles an hour and Janes went through the windshield. He was left completely paralyzed by the accident, able to move only his eyes.³⁴

Janes had been the effective head of Medalta Potteries and, other than Phillipson, was the only member of the management group living in Medicine Hat. March decided to sell. The company was taken over by a syndicate headed by W. G. Pulkingham, former President of Sovereign Potteries, Hamilton. Pulkingham had sold Sovereign to an English company, Johnson Brothers, in 1947; he remained as general manager until 1952, when W. H. Hall was sent by the parent company to become president of its Canadian operations.³⁵ At that point Pulkingham began looking for another pottery to

²⁸ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXIII, No. 11 (November 1950) p.16.

²⁹ C. Hehr and M. Haas on behalf of Medicine Hat Pottery Workers to Dr. J.L. Robinson, Minister of Industries and Labour, Edmonton, December 10, 1950 (PAA 69.131/2021).

³⁰ *Edmonton Journal* January 2, 1951.

³¹ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXII, No. 2 (February 1949) p.14.

³² J.A. Head, Barrister, Toronto to J.H. Yuill, August 8, 1950 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers); J.H. Yuill to Ferro Enamels (Canada) Ltd., Oakville, Ontario, October 3, 1951 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

³³ Medalta Potteries Ltd. Balance Sheet, December 31, 1952 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

³⁴ Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (December 4, 1994).

³⁵ *Hamilton Spectator* October 24, 1967.

invest in, and travelled to Alberta to see the Medalta plant. He purchased the company in 1953 from Alfred March, although the latter remained on the Board of Directors.³⁶

Pulkingham tried to surround himself with his former staff. George McLeod, who had been a sales manager at Sovereign, was appointed plant manager in place of Ed Phillipson, and Phillipson's name was no longer listed on the Board of Directors.³⁷ Pulkingham tried to recruit Bill Wyatt Jr. and other key men from Ontario to go back to Medalta.³⁸ The company continued to produce its existing lines of stoneware, artware and hotel china. A wide range of hotel wares produced in 1953 and 1954 was supplied to the Harrison Hot Springs Hotel, the Ranchmen's Club, the Hotel Wales in Calgary and numerous other clients. But the new owners planned to expand the operations of the plant, and installed a new decorating unit to produce dinnerware.³⁹ New lines of dinnerware were



Medalta began producing lighter, more decorative dinnerware after Bill Pulkingham took over in 1953. (Decorators at Medalta, 1954: A8690, PAA.)

³⁶Medalta Potteries Ltd. Annual Statement, December 31, 1952 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

³⁷Medalta Potteries Ltd. Annual Statement, December 31, 1953 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

³⁸Interview with B. Wyatt (son of Jesse William Wyatt), Fergus, Ontario (May 9, 1994).

³⁹"Medalta Potteries Changes Hands," *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXVI, No. 5 (May 1953) p.14.

developed in solid colours and patterns, and the dish shapes were updated: square plates with rounded corners were introduced, and plates with an asymmetrical cup holder.

Pulkingham clearly wanted to make some dramatic changes to Medalta's operations. The financial records which survive indicate that the company had been in bad shape since 1947, with losses reported for 1948 and 1952. Expanding into new dinnerware lines was just a beginning: Pulkingham needed to find steady clients to replace the government contracts which the company had become used to in the 1940s. Medalta had made a name for its hotel china, but British potteries were working hard to win back that market. Pulkingham had been on the receiving end of this battle when Sovereign was taken over by Johnson Brothers in 1947, and he was replaced by an English manager in 1952. No doubt, his experience with Sovereign influenced Pulkingham's decisions about Medalta. He wanted something other than hotel china to provide the company's market base. In 1950, the *Clay Products News* had recorded a growing interest in "premiums," custom-designed for organizations as giveaways and novelty pieces.⁴⁰ In 1953, the *News* reported that dinnerware and hotel china were in general maintaining a steady business across Canada, noting that "Premium Ware" contracts had helped to keep business good.⁴¹ In 1954 Pulkingham decided to move into the premium market, and sell Medalta's dinnerware to theatres.

Something went wrong with Pulkingham's plan. Phillipson later recounted that retooling the plant for the new giveaway merchandise took longer than Pulkingham had predicted, and was more expensive than planned. He also blamed the advent of home television, which meant prospective patrons stayed in their living rooms instead of going out to the movie theatres.⁴² Internal change may also have complicated the plan: in 1954 Max C. Haas of Toronto took over from Pulkingham as company president, where he remained until 1955.⁴³

Medalta Potteries discontinued operations in September 1954.⁴⁴ The pottery employees were thrown out of work. Some of them were taken on by Medicine Hat Potteries – Ed Phillipson, Tom Hulme, and several experienced jiggersmen and decorators.⁴⁵ The others relied on the union. After months of waiting to see whether the company would revive, the union tried to solicit outside help. The CCL Local representing the pottery informed City Council it would support "any progressive action" Council took to insure that Medalta would reopen in the immediate future.⁴⁶ But the pottery owners

⁴⁰ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record* Vol. XXIII, No. 9 (September 1950), p.4.

⁴¹ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 (January 1953) p.16.

⁴² Interview with E.G. Phillipson, Medicine Hat (December 4, 1994).

⁴³ Medalta Potteries Ltd. Annual Statement, December 31, 1954 and December 31, 1955 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

⁴⁴ M.C. Graves, Official Receiver, Medalta Potteries Ltd. to the Registrar of Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, September 28, 1959 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

⁴⁵ Medicine Hat Potteries Account Ledger, 1954 (CPIC Archives).

⁴⁶ City Council Minutes, April 4, 1955.

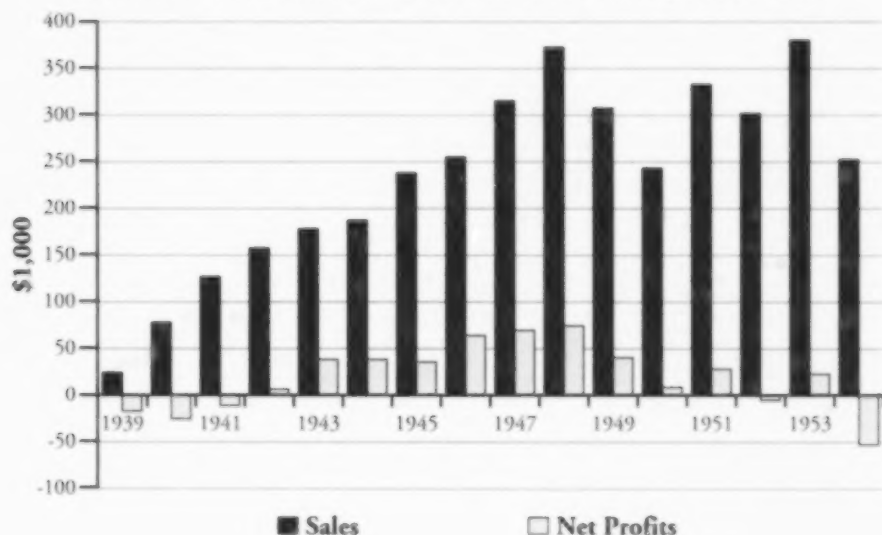
themselves had nothing to invest. The company's Secretary advised the Provincial Registrar that Medalta had "been in an insolvent position for a considerable time."

The Company is absolutely without funds and cannot even pay its auditors so as to obtain an audited financial statement for an Annual Meeting.⁴⁷

THE END OF THE YUILL DOMAIN

Medalta's bankruptcy likely came as welcome news to the Medicine Hat Potteries. With the general decline of the pottery business, it might have seemed encouraging to have one less player on the field. Over the years, Medicine Hat Potteries had seen considerable variation in the ratio of its profits to sales, fluctuating between 20% profits and 20% losses (Figure 13). Since 1948, profits had dropped off quite steadily with a loss of over \$52,000 in 1954.⁴⁸

Figure 13
Medicine Hat Potteries: Sales and Net Profits, 1939-1954



⁴⁷C.G. Greenfield, Secretary, Medalta Potteries Ltd. to the Registrar of Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, November 15, 1955 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

⁴⁸H.J. Williams, President, Locana Corporation Ltd., Montreal to J.C. Mayne, Calgary Supervisor, Royal Bank of Canada, February 7, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers); "Alberta Clay Products Ltd. With Medicine Hat Potteries - Audited Statements of the Company," 1939-1954 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

Medicine Hat Potteries was experiencing its own inner turmoil in the early 1950s. Like Medalta, it was suffering financially although it was buffered by continuing profits from its parent company, Alberta Clay Products. The sewer pipe plant remained busy, using about 125 tons of clay each day, and earning on average over \$66,000 per year between 1949 and 1954.⁴⁹ On balance, the Yuill enterprise was surviving admirably. However, family politics threatened to undermine it.

Hop Yuill and his brother Willard (Bill) were both involved in managing the family business. Hop had been in charge of Alberta Clay Products and Medicine Hat Potteries since the death of their father Harry Yuill in 1944. His experience was primarily in the office; Bill, on the other hand, had started out on the factory floor and gradually worked his way up to Vice President. In 1955, the two became locked in a power struggle over which of them should hold final authority. Bill represented a majority of shares in the company and tried to force Hop's hand.

Hop responded by surreptitiously trying to buy up shares from the company's other shareholders. At the same time, he entertained the possibility of selling out his interest in the company entirely, hoping to either remove himself from the situation, or to edge Bill out of his controlling position.⁵⁰ Hop managed to buy out most of the company's shareholders for between \$65 and \$75 per share, ending up with 2,665 of the companies' 8,300 shares.⁵¹ He later noted his financial advisers informed him they were worth closer to \$150 each.⁵² In April 1955 he quietly lined up two prospective buyers for his portion of the companies, one of whom was Ron Hungerford of the Clayburn Company in Vancouver.⁵³ Hop's asking price was \$160 per share.⁵⁴

Despite the intensity of his scheming, Hop's efforts were most likely directed at a swan song. Hop was 58 years old in 1955, and confided to a family friend that he was beginning to contemplate his retirement.⁵⁵ His interest in the clay products industry appeared to be waning. Hop had tried since 1947 to change course or jump ship, but his efforts had been unsuccessful. By 1955, he felt there was no real future left in the business:

⁴⁹J.H. Yuill to A.H. Holmes, Flagstone BC, December 17, 1953 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers); J.H. Yuill to R.M. Hungerford, Clayburn Co. Ltd., Vancouver, April 28, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵⁰J.H. Yuill to C.C. Campbell, Shareholder in Alberta Clay Products, November 5, 1954 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵¹J.H. Yuill to R.M. Hungerford, Clayburn Co. Ltd., Vancouver, April 28, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³J.H. Yuill to R.M. Hungerford, Clayburn Co. Ltd., Vancouver, April 27, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵⁴H.J. Williams, President, Locana Corporation Ltd., Montreal to J.C. Mayne, Calgary Supervisor, Royal Bank of Canada, February 7, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵⁵J.H. Yuill to C.C. Campbell, Michigan, September 29, 1954 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

The Alberta Clay Products has been a good operation but like all small and many large companies it has certain peculiarities that don't show in figures in a financial statement. Reviewing the operation over the last 34 years in which I have been on the job it is my opinion the operation is just as good but the chance to make a good profit and the opportunity to build up a good reserve are just memories. It is a hand to mouth existence at best, and when things quieten down as they seem to be doing now it will be a case of selling apples to keep going.⁵⁶

While Hop was busy with his arrangements, Bill had been making negotiations of his own with Mr. Turvey of Marwell Construction, a Vancouver-based operation.⁵⁷ In April, 1955 he informed Hop along with all the other shareholders that Marwell had offered to buy the company. However, he made it clear that Marwell had several major concerns in taking on the operation. For the past few years the company paid more in dividends than it earned, a policy which had limited the company's ability to modernize and expand its production. The main plant had barely changed in two decades. Meanwhile, concrete pipe was gaining a larger portion of the market, leaving Alberta Clay Products behind. Marwell's conclusion on the basis of this analysis was: "There is little or no market existing for your shares at present." As a result, the asking price was \$100 per share, to be paid as \$50 in cash and \$50 invested in ten-year debentures at 5½ per cent.⁵⁸ Hop told Ron Hungerford about the proposal, saying he was pleased to either accept this price or pass it on to Ron.⁵⁹

While Hop was clearly apprised of the sale, he was apparently not prepared for what happened next. The new owners relieved Hop of his responsibilities. More than forty years later, his son Bill still vividly recalled coming home from school that day in April 1955 to find his father sitting in the living room. In reply to his son's question, Hop told him, "I just lost my job."⁶⁰

Hop busied himself with the other arm of the family holdings: Monarch Investments Ltd. and the Monarch Broadcasting Company which operated Medicine Hat's first radio broadcasting station, CHAT. He also retained ownership of Alberta Potteries Ltd. in Redcliff. Jack Cunliffe, former manager of Medalta, had been in charge of the plant's

⁵⁶J.H. Yuill to P.P. Halls, Shareholder in Alberta Clay Products, October 12, 1954 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵⁷J.H. Yuill to R.M. Hungerford, Clayburn Co. Ltd., Vancouver, April 27, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

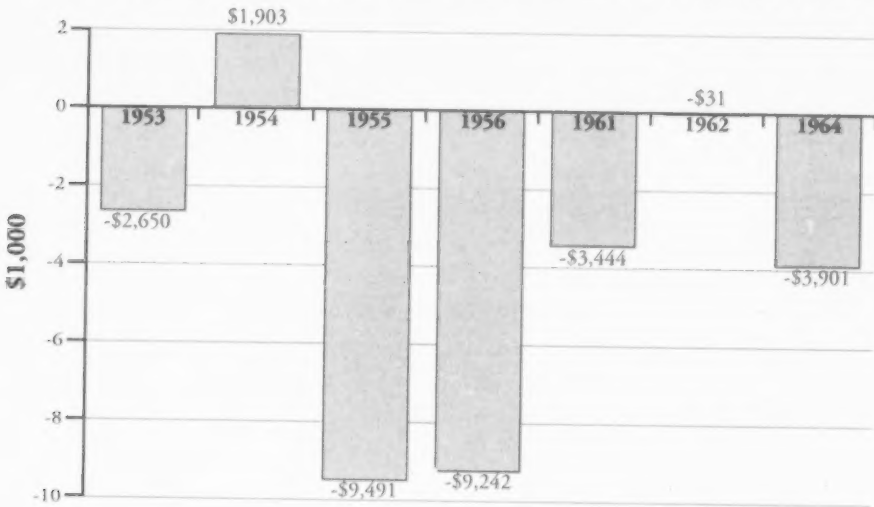
⁵⁸W.C. Yuill to The Shareholders, Alberta Clay Products Co. Ltd., April 28, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁵⁹J.H. Yuill to R.M. Hungerford, Clayburn Co. Ltd., Vancouver, April 27, 1955 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁶⁰Interview with W.H. Yuill (son of J.H. Yuill), Medicine Hat (July 19, 1996).

production since 1948.⁶¹ However, the little pottery must have served more as a hobby than anything else. Production was virtually limited to stoneware teapots and, as the table below (Figure 14) indicates, it was not a profitable concern.⁶²

Figure 14
Alberta Potteries Ltd. Net Profit for Available Years, 1953-1964



HYCROFT CHINA LTD.: A BRIEF RESPITE

Medicine Hat Potteries, on the other hand, appeared to enjoy a new lease on life in 1955 and 1956. The company was renamed Hycroft China Ltd. after a new apartment building Marwell had just completed in Vancouver. Business was sufficiently busy that Hycroft began leasing the Medalta factory for \$1,100 per month, operating it in conjunction with its own plant.⁶³ Some of Medalta's unused equipment – pugmills, jiggers, filters and other pottery machinery – was relocated to the Hycroft plant.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *The Clay Products News & Ceramic Record*, Vol. XXII, No. 2 (February 1949) p.14.

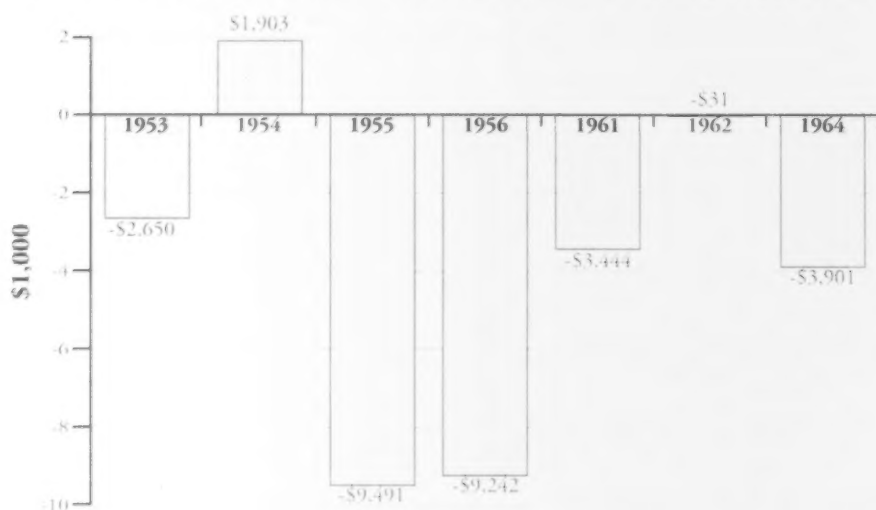
⁶² *Ibid.*: chart figures taken from documents pertaining to Corporate Tax Returns for 1957 and 1965 (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

⁶³ C.G. Greenfield, Secretary, Medalta Potteries Ltd. to the Registrar of Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, November 15, 1955 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

⁶⁴ Listing of "Pottery Assets For Sale" included in the Report of the Finance Committee, City Council Minutes October 26, 1959.

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⁶⁴ Listing of "Pottery Assets For Sale" included in the Report of the Finance Committee, City Council Minutes October 26, 1959.

Within months of assuming ownership of the plant, Hycroft's owners contracted the firm of Stevenson & Kellogg to complete a time and motion study on the factory's operations.⁶⁵ Don King led a workshop-style session with the plant employees, introducing them to "methods time measurement" as a tool for analyzing and improving productivity. Down-to-earth examples were used to ensure that employees understood the principles: for instance, employees were asked to write their signature continuously for one minute and explain the 'variation in productivity' which resulted in some being able to write their names 13 times and others only 6. On the basis of this approach, King eased the staff into assessing their productivity in pottery production. "In all our work here," King told them, "we will emphasize methods and try to find better and easier ways of making dinnerware without letting quality suffer."⁶⁶



This trimming table with its individually revolving work stations, was designed by Stevenson & Kellogg efficiency experts in consultation with Hycroft employees in about 1955. (Trim table: P525.323, MHM&AG.)

⁶⁵CPIC Archives.

⁶⁶Don King, "Methods, Motions and Methods Time Measurement," for Hycroft China Limited, August 1955 (CPIC Archives).

Standards were set for each area of production, specifying the tasks which had to be completed within a measured time period.⁶⁷ The standards were coupled with a Wage Incentive Policy introduced in September 1955, which matched employee performance to a series of bonus rates. Standards and incentives became articles of faith for the factory's managers. Each supervisor was instructed that he must not only understand the incentive program, but "believe in it and become the driving force behind it."⁶⁸ Ostensibly, the program allowed employees to earn up to 30% above the job rate.⁶⁹ In reality, it served more as a tool for detecting consistently low performance than for rewarding above-standard performance. As one of Hycroft's former jiggersmen stated, "The standards were so tough that you could never get the bonus. As soon as you made the quota, they'd just raise the standard."⁷⁰

The wares produced by Hycroft China were the same as those made by Medicine Hat Potteries. There was essentially no change in staffing at the plant when Marwell took over, other than the departure of Hop Yuill. Malcolm McArthur, who had worked at Medicine Hat Potteries since 1944, stayed on at Hycroft as plant manager. The only change introduced in the wares was that McArthur decided to copy Medalta's shapes. He instructed the jiggersmen to remake the stoneware shapes and patterns from the bankrupt company's moulds, and prepare them for standardized production.⁷¹ Other than that, Hycroft continued to turn out decorated dinnerware. William T. Clarke, who had previously handled Medicine Hat Potteries' wares in Ontario, continued to act as agent for Hycroft China.⁷²

While separate figures for Hycroft China are not available, federal statistics for Alberta's pottery production indicate a brief respite from the industry's downward trend in 1955 and 1956. 1955 saw a growth in sales of 7%, and a startling 29% in 1956. But in 1957, sales dropped again by 50%.⁷³ In April, 1957 Hycroft cancelled its lease agreement

⁶⁷For example, two minutes were allocated for packing 36 nine-inch plates in a carton, using the following method: 1) Set plates from crate to table; 2) Count plates in stacks of 36; 3) Get 8 cartons to the table from storage area; 4) Set one empty carton on table; 5) Set paper liners on table; 6) Stack plates with paper; 7) Stack 36 plates with paper in carton; 8) Close carton and glue it; 9) Set full carton on skid. Following these procedures, an experienced person working steadily at normal effort would pack a carton in two minutes. "Allowance time" was permitted for minor interruptions, start-up, clean-up, recording production, and fatigue at the rate of 10%. For packing cartons, working time was set at 200 minutes per 100 cartons, with a 10% time allowance of 20 minutes, giving a total of three hours to meet the standard.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, Article 4 (CPIC Archives).

⁶⁹"Wage Incentive Policy of Hycroft China Limited," September 1955, Article 1 (CPIC Archives).

⁷⁰Interview with B. Leismeister, former jiggerman at Medalta and Hycroft, Medicine Hat (June 23, 1994).

⁷¹Memo from M. McArthur, January 6, 1956 (PAA 69.235/489).

⁷²W.T. Clarke to H. Veiner, August 18, 1958 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁷³Figures based on statistics for 1955, 1956 and 1957 from *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada* Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa).

with Medalta Potteries. The Alberta Government Conservation Board had increased the price of gas in Medicine Hat, and Hycroft could not support the additional operating costs.⁷⁴ In 1958, the company restructured its finances in order to sell. When Marwell originally purchased the pottery from the shareholders of Medicine Hat Potteries, the price was paid in cash and debentures. Hycroft was forced to redeem the debentures in order to consolidate its assets. As a result, the company sustained a net loss in 1958 of over \$52,000.⁷⁵ Following the completion of an audited financial statement in June 1958, Hycroft China changed hands. The failing factory was acquired by Harry Veiner, rancher, businessman, and Mayor of Medicine Hat.⁷⁶

Veiner's approach to the pottery business was to concentrate on sales. He set to work organizing shipments to major retailers like Eaton's, Woolworth's and Zellers. Mid-range retailers such as Macleod's and Stedman's were approached as well. He even courted specialty clients like Canadian Art China Limited and Decalcomania Manufacturers.⁷⁷ Although Hycroft maintained warehouses in Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver, Veiner encouraged customers to order direct from the factory as it was "much more economical."⁷⁸

Veiner's aggressive marketing approach was successful, but it antagonized Hycroft's factory representatives. In July 1958, shortly after Veiner had purchased the company, one of these representatives questioned Hycroft's direct dealings with national chains. Doug Groff, President of Groff Agency Ltd., stated that the Woolworth's and Zellers stores which Hycroft had contacted fell in the respective territories of his Edmonton and Vancouver branch operators.⁷⁹ Veiner responded by discontinuing the company's relationship with Groff.⁸⁰

It was one thing for Veiner to alienate Hycroft's dealers. However, it was quite another to anger the company's clients. McArthur organized a contract with Woodward's, giving them exclusive sales rights over a new line of decorated dinnerware. But Veiner placed 'seconds' from the test firings with a local surplus store. When Woodward's became aware of this, they perceived it as a breach of good faith and cancelled the contract. McArthur left Hycroft shortly afterwards.⁸¹

⁷⁴Council Minutes, April 15, 1957, p.70.

⁷⁵Miller, Flynn & Co., Chartered Accountants, Medicine Hat to the Shareholders, Hycroft China Ltd., June 27, 1958 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁷⁶Miller, Flynn & Co., Chartered Accountants, Medicine Hat to the Registrar of Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, September 8, 1958 (Alberta Registries, File F-1455).

⁷⁷Correspondence, Yuill Papers (CPIC Archives).

⁷⁸"Hycroft Hand Decorated Open Stock Dinnerware Patterns," March 31, 1957; R.B. Reierson, Housewares Department, "Notice of Hycroft Preprint," n.d.

⁷⁹D.C. Groff, President, Groff Agency Ltd., Winnipeg to W.A. McArthur, General Manager, Hycroft China Ltd., July 22, 1958 (CPIC, Veiner Papers).

⁸⁰D.C. Groff to H. Veiner, August 26, 1958 (CPIC, Veiner Papers).

⁸¹Interview between M. McArthur and L. Simpson, January 21, 1993 in *Medalta Potteries Conservation Report*, August 1993 prepared by Simpson Roberts Wappell.

Hycroft continued to produce its lines of dinnerware in a range of bright colours and patterns, with decorations of hand-painted designs or decals. Plain white wares were produced as well, with a range of kitchen items like mixing bowls and pitchers, as well as table service items. Souvenirs were introduced as a regular production item. Hycroft made ashtrays, plates, beer steins, mugs and variety pieces with customized decorations – commemorative plates, prize mugs, personalized souvenirs.⁸² In fact, Council minutes during Veiner's tenure as Mayor are peppered with letters from local coordinators and visiting delegations, thanking the City for souvenir vases and ashtrays they received while in Medicine Hat. However, the market for dishes and souvenirs was not sufficient to maintain the plant, and Veiner's effort to rescue the Hycroft plant was beginning to look rather tenuous.

In the early 1960s, Veiner came up with another alternative. Hycroft began making sanitary ware from imported porcelain clays. The toilets which they manufactured were supplied to Wessan Plumbing Manufacturing Ltd. of Streetsville, Ontario.⁸³ Production was initially quite problematic. Toilet bowls came out of the kiln with cracks at the back of the rim, making them inoperable.⁸⁴ The tanks warped at the base, causing them to crack and break when the bolts were tightened.⁸⁵ But business prospects were good, and Wessan pushed Hycroft to keep trying.⁸⁶

Hycroft's results continued to disappoint its clients. A shipment of "Ambassador" toilets sent to Saskatoon in 1963 was reported to be a bit discouraging: out of more than 25 units, only one was described as "nearly acceptable."⁸⁷ The finish on all the toilets was irregular, disfigured with ripples, discolorations, rough areas, and small holes. The complete shipment was sent back to Medicine Hat with a warning to Wessan from the Saskatchewan distributor:

Western [another Saskatchewan client] has orders for Ambassadors and they are anxious to push these but they want first quality. If you have any good ones available they should be shipped but if they are the same as the ones received here then the freight may as well be saved."⁸⁸

⁸²Hycroft China Price Lists, 1957 and 1967 (CPIC Archives).

⁸³Correspondence, March 6, 1967 (CPIC, Veiner Papers).

⁸⁴"Report on Bowls Out of Kiln To Date," November 1, 1962 (CPIC, Veiner Papers).

⁸⁵H. Scott, Vice-President and General Manager, Wessan Plumbing Manufacturing Ltd. to Hycroft China, August 27, 1963 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁸⁶H. Scott, Scotwell Ltd., Toronto to H. Veiner, October 4, 1963 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁸⁷G. Eyolfson, Meikle Meacham, Saskatoon to B. Wrigley, Wessan Plumbing Manufacturing Ltd., Ontario, October 1, 1963 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

After some analysis at the factory, Veiner sealed the building's exterior in 1965. Drafts had to be prevented as they caused the toilets and tanks to crack as they were drying. However, as a result the factory became unbearably hot as a workplace.⁸⁹

A much more serious problem was presented by Capitol Plumbing & Heating Inc. in September 1969. The company, which installed Hycroft toilets in three building projects in Montreal, encountered many difficulties in the process including the fact that most of them leaked. The opening in the tank where the plumbing fittings were designed to connect was oval instead of round, causing them to leak. Capitol had to reassemble and repack the fittings, but held Hycroft responsible for any damages arising from the defective tanks. Veiner contested the charge, scrawling in a definitive hand over their letter, "This outfit is crazy – absolutely no!"⁹⁰ However, Hycroft was held liable for \$2,180 in damages.⁹¹ Perhaps as a result of this fiasco, Wessan Plumbing subsequently arranged for CSA (Canadian Standards Association) Certification on Hycroft's vitreous china plumbing fixtures.⁹² Veiner started looking for other options for the plant, including the possibility of manufacturing tile.⁹³

Veiner managed to keep Hycroft operating, but the factory's production became less and less ambitious. By 1985, even the specialty orders of decorated souvenirs were given up.⁹⁴ The warehouse was full of boxed sets of decorated dinnerware manufactured years earlier. In August 1988 a fire in the centre of the plant's main building damaged the kiln and roof. Repairs were completed by December 21, 1988. Production slowed to a halt in 1989. Harry Veiner died in 1991 at the age of 87. The company was dissolved on October 19, 1992, and struck from the Register on February 20, 1993.⁹⁵

FITS AND STARTS: THE INDUSTRY'S FINAL YEARS

Malcolm McArthur had been in the pottery business for over ten years by the time he left Hycroft, and felt he was ready to start his own venture. With financial backing from

⁸⁹Videotaped interview of Leona Leismeister, former Hycroft employee, March 26, 1994 (CPIC Archives).

⁹⁰V. Resnick, President, Capitol Plumbing & Heating Inc., Montreal to Emco Ltd., Montreal, September 5, 1969 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Paper).

⁹¹A. Marra, Plumbing & Heating Sales Manager, Emco Ltd., Montreal to Wessan Products Ltd., Streetsville, Ontario, September 9, 1969 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁹²F.R. McKeon, Division Manager, Wessan Plumbing Manufacturing Ltd. to H. Veiner, Hycroft China Ltd., May 7, 1971 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁹³H. Veiner to Hoffman Tile Manufacturing Company Inc., Ontario, California June 13, 1967 (CPIC Archives, Veiner Papers).

⁹⁴Ron Getty, *The Kilns of South Eastern Alberta* (Medicine Hat: IMC Press, 1994) p.46.

⁹⁵"Certificate of Intent to Dissolve," October 19, 1992 (Alberta Registries, File F-1455).

Marsh & Greenfield of Toronto, he took over the Medalta site in 1958.⁹⁶ Under the name "New Medalta Ceramics," he began making stoneware crockery, commemorative plates and decorated dinnerware, including a set of dishes with a birch bark pattern. Unfortunately, the operation was destroyed by fire on December 24, 1958.⁹⁷

The untimely end of McArthur's venture raised the question of what was to be done with the Medalta site. The official assignment of bankruptcy for Medalta Potteries was made on September 29, 1958. The pottery's assets were subsequently offered for sale by the company's official receiver, with bids accepted until October 30, 1959.⁹⁸ Council's Finance Committee recommended the City should make a bid of \$100,000 for the land and buildings, to be paid in part by the cancellation of all taxes, utilities, and penalties which Medalta owed the City. If the bid was accepted, the City proposed to offer the properties for sale as soon as possible, for a sum not less than \$125,000. It was hoped that the facilities could be put out to tender, and the pottery re-opened for business.⁹⁹

On December 7, 1959, a Calgary lawyer by the name of M.E. Shannon appeared before Medicine Hat's City Council on behalf of Malcolm McArthur and Associates. Shannon presented a list of rather hostile questions to the aldermen, insinuating that Mayor Veiner was acting in conflict of interest by getting Council to bid on the Medalta property. He accused Veiner directly of bidding \$10,000 on pottery-making equipment and machinery from the bankrupt plant which had been valued at over \$100,000. Veiner vigorously denied the allegation, calling Shannon first a liar and then a damned liar, before exclaiming heatedly that the lawyer could not stand up to his statement either mentally or physically. Jumping to his feet, Veiner declared he would take Shannon on in a fight. One of the aldermen quickly intervened, observing that "Council Chamber was not the place for Mr. Shannon to use as a battering ram for himself or anybody else." It was pointed out to Shannon that many of his statements were in fact incorrect. Council agreed to accept his brief and answer the questions it contained. In closing, the alderman stated that if the gentlemen represented by Shannon were successful in bidding on the property, then "God Bless Them."¹⁰⁰

Medalta's assets were finally sold on January 5, 1960. However, almost two years later, the company's official receiver reported that the estate had not yet been fully wound up:

⁹⁶Interview between M. McArthur and L. Simpson, January 21, 1993 in *Medalta Potteries Conservation Report*, August 1993 prepared by Simpson Roberts Wappell.

⁹⁷Ron Getty, *The Kilns of South Eastern Alberta* (Medicine Hat: IMC Press, 1994) p.47.

⁹⁸Notice of "Pottery Assets For Sale," attached to the Report of the Finance Committee, October 26, 1959.

⁹⁹City Council Minutes, Special Meeting, October 26, 1959. The City of Medicine Hat had previously made an unsuccessful bid for the assets of Medalta Potteries in March, 1958. Had that bid been accepted, the main factory building would have been converted into a city garage. (Peter Mehrer, "Run that by me again," *Medicine Hat News*, Section C2, November 14, 1987.)

¹⁰⁰Summarized from City Council Minutes, December 7, 1959.

"Owing to disagreement among the solicitors, only minor points have been settled."¹⁰¹ On May 15, 1965, Medalta Potteries was finally struck off as a registered company.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, City Council's hope that the Medalta site would re-open as a working pottery came to fruition in 1960. McArthur and his associates, the Thrall family of Lethbridge, were successful in obtaining the old Medalta premises. Ralph Thrall Sr. and his son Ralph Jr. commanded a multi-million dollar enterprise which included Mountain Minerals Ltd. and the McIntyre Ranching Company Ltd. The Thralls provided venture capital and McArthur brought expertise in pottery production. Together, they set up Sunburst Ceramics Ltd. in March, 1960.¹⁰³

Within months of setting up the new pottery, the Thralls decided to change managers. Bill McPherson, who had worked as Mining Superintendent for Mountain Minerals in British Columbia, was planning to move to Alberta on a permanent basis. Ralph Jr. hoped to hire him to run the pottery. In order to familiarize McPherson with clays and pottery production, Ralph contacted W.G. Worcester at the University of Saskatchewan.¹⁰⁴ Worcester and McPherson completed a field study of ball clays in Southern Saskatchewan at the Thrall's expense.¹⁰⁵ By February 1961, McPherson had replaced McArthur as plant manager.¹⁰⁶

Working with McPherson, the Thralls established a new concept in Alberta's pottery industry. Sunburst Ceramics employed the craftsmanship and artistry of studio-trained potters, several of them graduates of the ceramics program at the Alberta College of Art. Between 1960 and 1966, four distinguished Alberta potters managed the plant's operations: Walter Dexter, Olle Holmsten, Neil Gravsén and John Porter.¹⁰⁷

Some of the wares produced by Sunburst were distinctive, with unique designs combining form and function. But many of the company's products were the staple stoneware crocks and bean pots. Walter Dexter, who worked as designer and production manager from 1961 to 1963, found his position disappointing because his designs were never used.¹⁰⁸ His opinion was echoed by Olle Holmsten, who stayed at the plant for only

¹⁰¹N.G. Graves, Official Receiver, Medalta Potteries Ltd. to the Registrar of Companies, Edmonton, Alberta, November 1, 1961 (Alberta Registries, File F-1753).

¹⁰²James Warr, Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, Alberta.

¹⁰³Certificate of Incorporation, Sunburst Ceramics Ltd. (Alberta Registries, File 26766).

¹⁰⁴R. Thrall Jr. to W.G. Worcester, September 20, 1965 (UofS Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers, MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

¹⁰⁵W.G. Worcester to R. Thrall Jr., Mountain Minerals, Lethbridge, November 11, 1965 (UofS Archives, W.G. Worcester Papers, MG 32S1, Accn. 73-6).

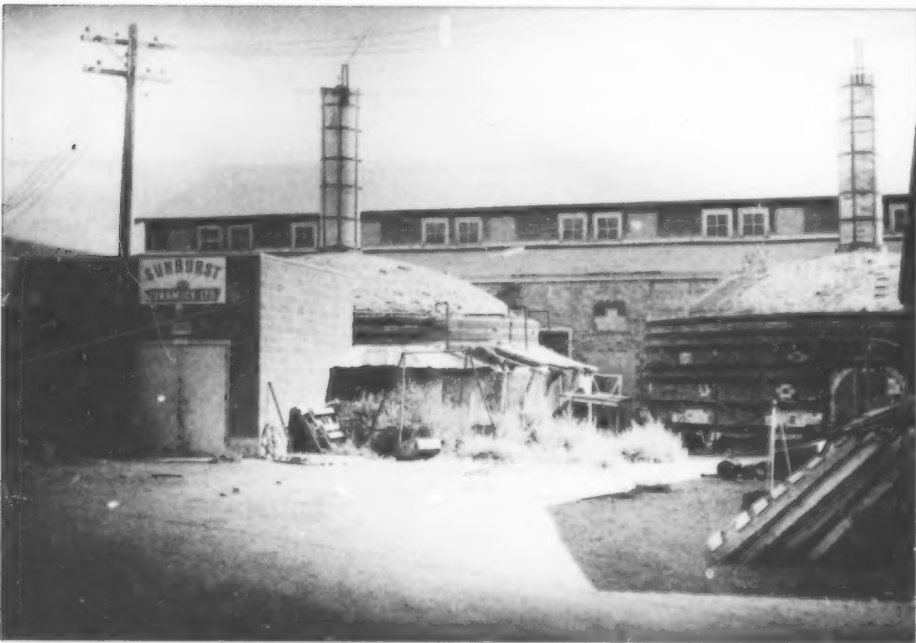
¹⁰⁶Sunburst Ceramics Ltd., Notice of Directors, February 28, 1961 (Alberta Registries, File 26766).

¹⁰⁷Artist biographies in *Studio Ceramics in Alberta II: 1953-1963* and *Alberta Clay Comes of Age* (exhibition catalogues jointly produced by the Alberta Potters' Association and the Alberta Art Foundation in 1982 and 1986 respectively).

¹⁰⁸*Studio Ceramics in Alberta II: 1953-1963* (Edmonton: Alberta Art Foundation, 1982) p.21.

a few months in 1962.¹⁰⁹ Neil Graven worked intermittently for the Thralls: after his first stint in 1963 he returned in 1966-67 and again in 1972, but finally left in frustration in 1973.¹¹⁰ John Porter was there from 1963 to 1966, but only out of necessity: as soon as he could afford to leave Sunburst he returned to studio production.¹¹¹

The Thralls were experiencing frustrations of their own. The old buildings and equipment of the former Medalta Potteries were not adequate for Sunburst's production. The Thralls had repaired the damages to the factory resulting from the fire in 1958 which had put McArthur out of business. However, other areas of the complex were still problematic: the old beehive kilns were either condemned or non-productive, and the tunnel kilns which had been Ed Phillipson's pride were now twenty years old.¹¹² The Thralls



Sunburst adopted a high-tech approach to pottery production, despite its somewhat dilapidated setting in the crumbling Medalta factory buildings. (Sunburst 1969: A.1067/B, PAA.)

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51

¹¹⁰ *Alberta Clay comes of age* (Edmonton: Alberta Potters' Association/Alberta Art Foundation, 1986) pp. 110-113; Marylu Antonelli and Jack Forbes, *Pottery in Alberta: The Long Tradition* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1978) p. 165.

¹¹¹ *Alberta Clay comes of age* p. 56.

¹¹² Interview between M. McArthur and L. Simpson, January 21, 1993 in *Medalta Potteries Conservation Report*, August 1993 prepared by Simpson Roberts Wappell.

invested heavily in new equipment, and by 1966 faced the fact that they had to invest in a new building. The plant was relocated to a more compact facility in Lethbridge.¹¹³

The expense of producing and marketing Sunburst's wares was daunting. Following the move to Lethbridge, the Thralls increased their authorized capital from the original amount of \$300,000 to \$550,000. By 1971, they were registering their expensive equipment as chattel against mortgages and debentures with the Alberta Commercial Corporation and the Alberta Opportunity Company. Starting with a loan of \$40,000 the company worked its way up to \$352,000 before once again increasing its authorized capital from \$550,000 to \$1.2 million.¹¹⁴

At the end of 1975, Sunburst Ceramics closed down. The Thralls had appealed to the provincial government for more financial assistance, but were turned down. The province assessed Sunburst's dismal track record, and decided it was no longer willing to subsidize the beleaguered pottery.¹¹⁵ Sunburst was absorbed by the family's McIntyre Ranching Company, valued at \$21.1 million, which was able to discharge the pottery's debts.¹¹⁶

In 1966, one final effort was made to revive the pottery industry. Medalta Potteries (1966) Ltd. was a modest operation set up by John ("Shorty") Matuska and William Crockford. They took over the old Alberta Potteries facility in Redcliff. Originally built as an automobile factory, the building had been renovated for use as a pottery by the Wyatts in the early 1930s, and subsequently taken over by Hop Yuill in 1941.¹¹⁷ Yuill had continued to operate the pottery after the Alberta Clay Products and Medicine Hat Potteries were sold in 1955, until he finally closed down production in 1964.¹¹⁸ However, the company remained on the provincial register, and was restructured in October 1965 to include Yuill's two sons, Harry Harlan and Willard Hervey, as Directors. Four months later, the company premises were leased to Matuska and Crockford, where they began producing crocks and flowerpots.¹¹⁹

A fire destroyed the building within a few months of operation, and Matuska and Crockford obtained a provincial government loan to build a new factory and repair the damaged machinery. The new building, a pre-fabricated aluminum quonset hut, was

¹¹³Sunburst Ceramics Ltd. Annual Report, December 31, 1966 (Alberta Registries, File 26766).

The Thrall family retained ownership of the Medalta plant, leasing out some of the buildings for warehouse space. They eventually sold it in 1976 to Earthex Resources Ltd., a Medicine Hat real estate and investment firm.

¹¹⁴Certificates issued by J. Warr, Registrar of Companies (Alberta Registries, File 26766).

¹¹⁵Antonelli and Forbes, *op. cit.*, p.167.

¹¹⁶Special Resolution of the Shareholders of Sunburst Ceramics Ltd., December 3, 1975; Certificate of Discharge of Debenture, May 31, 1976 (Alberta Registries, File 26766).

¹¹⁷The plant had also operated briefly in 1939 under the name Provincial Industrial Enterprises; See Ron Getty's *The Kilns of South East Alberta*, p.36-38.

¹¹⁸Corporate Tax Return for 1965. (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

¹¹⁹Medalta Potteries (1966) Ltd. Certificate of Incorporation (Alberta Registries, File 40751).

erected over the two surviving kilns which Wyatt had built in 1931. Unfortunately, no allowance was made for the intense humidity and condensation caused by the clay-drying process. Tents of plastic sheeting were draped throughout the hut to catch the condensation as it fell like rain inside the building.¹²⁰

The two partners ran short of money before the building was completed. In June 1968 they increased the company's authorized capital from its initial \$20,000 to \$70,000, and sold shares in the pottery to local businesses and residents.¹²¹ In 1971, Matuska died and Roy Ogilvie, a farmer and shareholder in the pottery, took over as General Manager.¹²² Working with Emil Janke and Frank Anheeler, jiggermen from the former Medalta plant, the little pottery continued to produce simple, utilitarian stoneware crockery in the tradition of its namesake, Medalta Potteries. In fact, some of the wares were marked with stamps from the old Medalta factory, leading to confusion amongst collectors later on.¹²³

Medalta Potteries (1966) stopped manufacturing twenty years after it started. Although the pottery had supplied several retail outlets from Winnipeg to Vancouver, the market for its wares was fairly limited. Its primary business had been over-the-counter sales, geared largely to the tourist trade coming through town on the Trans-Canada Highway.¹²⁴

The end of the pottery industry in Redcliff came in 1986. Three years later, production stopped at Hycroft China bringing an end to a 77-year tradition in Medicine Hat. The industry had gone from manufacturing "household and commercial necessities" to making souvenirs for incidental tourists.

¹²⁰Mirielle Keeling, "Of Earth and Fire: A Study of the Clay Products Industry, Medicine Hat and Redcliff 1885-1980" (unpublished report prepared for Alberta Culture Historic Sites Service and the Department of Extension, University of Alberta; MHM&AG Archives M83.15.28 F1 and F2) p.93.

¹²¹Minutes of Special Meeting of Shareholders, June 12, 1968 (Alberta Registries, File 40751).

¹²²Medalta Potteries (1966) Ltd., Annual Report, December 31, 1971 (Alberta Registries, File 40751).

¹²³See Ron Getty's *The Kilns of South East Alberta*, p.56.

¹²⁴Mirielle Keeling, *op. cit.*, p.94.

CHAPTER 11

FROM INDUSTRY TO INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

The pottery industry in Medicine Hat had essentially collapsed by 1960. A few factories continued to produce pottery using industrial manufacturing techniques. However, the scale of their operations was considerably reduced, and the market for their wares correspondingly shrunken. Even the last of these was finally forced to close in the 1980s.

As the pottery industry wound down in the 1950s and 1960s, three trends became apparent. First, the significance of studio pottery in Alberta began to grow. The Alberta College of Art developed an influential ceramics program under the direction of Luke Lindoe in 1947. Lindoe's roots in the art of studio potting were formed in the clay products industry in Medicine Hat, where he worked for Alberta Potteries and Medicine Hat Brick & Tile between 1941 and 1984. He instigated the development of artist-run production studios in Alberta when he founded Lindoe Studios in 1955.

The second trend was the development of the clay supply industry. As studio pottery became more popular, not just in Alberta but elsewhere in Canada as well, a market developed for potters' clay. Artists, educators and students required a steady supply of ready-to-use clay in order to create their wares. Again under the leadership of Luke Lindoe, this industry was developed in Medicine Hat when he founded Plainsman Clay in 1964.

The third trend was the modernization and consolidation of the clay products industry in Medicine Hat. The post-war boom, which had been little more than an empty promise for the pottery industry, was a major influence in the success of clay products manufacturing. The early and somewhat flamboyant success of Alberta Clay Products was overtaken by the careful and methodical approach of the Sissons' family in building up the Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Company.

LINDOE STUDIOS

Luke Lindoe was born in Bashaw, Alberta in 1913. He began studying art at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary, financing his studies by working in the coal mines of southern Alberta. In 1940, he went to the Ontario College of Art to specialize in sculpture, but while there became interested in ceramics. Uncertain how best to pursue his interest, Lindoe called on William Clarke, Toronto distributor for Medicine Hat Potteries. Lindoe wanted practical experience in pottery, and Clarke wanted Medicine Hat Potteries to develop more imaginative product lines.

I went down to his little warehouse on Front Street and looked at what he had. I asked him if he was happy with it. He explained that indeed he would



A disastrous fire swept through the Alberta Clay Products plant in 1961. (Fire at Alberta Clay Products: P442.3, MHM&AG.)

like to have a great deal more and a little bit more imagination. It was pretty dull stuff coming out of there.¹

Clarke asked Lindoe to make a trial piece, suggesting he design a souvenir ashtray for British pilots from the Royal Air Force stationed in Canada. Lindoe blended a mustang fighter into an ashtray form. Clarke was so impressed that he immediately wired Medicine Hat Potteries and got Lindoe a job. He was hired to supervise production at Hop Yuill's new pottery in Redcliff. But it took several weeks before he was ready to begin making pottery: the plant had been unused since 1937 when Martin Perry and John Matuska abandoned it. "I cleaned it out," Lindoe later recalled. "Chased out the pigeons and swept out their filth, cleaned out the kilns, and got the old gas engines working to run the pug mill and the filter press and the jigger lines. It was a real challenge."²

Lindoe's work in the pottery industry ended after a few months in 1941. He grew frustrated with Yuill's limited production schedule, describing their relationship as "a very unhappy duet."³ Lindoe had wanted an opportunity to experiment and develop new wares; Yuill wanted someone to get the pottery running. As soon as the plant was operational, Yuill made it clear that production for the time being would be limited to bowls. Lindoe left and, after a brief period working with Imperial Oil, started teaching at the Alberta College of Art in Calgary.

In 1947, Lindoe was asked to head up a new ceramic program at the College in the area of industrial design. Placing a heavy emphasis on form, Lindoe taught his students to explore the possibilities of pottery shapes as a way of comprehending function. He gave them shapes to experiment with, getting them to re-design the same form as a bottle, an ice-water container, and a teapot.⁴ This functional clarity was an important aspect of Lindoe's approach to industrial design. In 1954, he branched out from teaching and ventured into the commercial field. With the financial backing of Dr. J. C. Sproule, a geologist, he founded Lindoe Studios in Calgary. Lindoe continued to work half-time at the Alberta College of Art, and hired his students to work in the pottery.⁵

The partnership between Lindoe and Sproule dissolved in 1957 when Lindoe became Research Director for Medicine Hat Brick & Tile.⁶ However, the studio continued under the name of Ceramic Arts Calgary and retained its indirect affiliation with the Alberta College of Art. The company was managed by several distinguished Alberta potters after Lindoe left, including Vivian Lindoe, Walter Dexter and John Porter.⁷ Despite the

¹*Studio Ceramics in Alberta I, 1947-1952* (Edmonton: Alberta Art Foundation, 1981) p.9.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, p.14.

⁵Interview with Luke Lindoe, Medicine Hat (November 11, 1992).

⁶*Studio Ceramics in Alberta II, 1953-1963* (Edmonton: Alberta Art Foundation, 1982) p.62.

⁷*Ibid.*, *passim*.

availability of excellent local clays and natural gas for fueling, no secure market for the company's wares existed until 1963. In the words of John Porter, it was then possible to "survive modestly."⁸ Initially, markets were much better in Toronto and Montreal; however, over time the company's wares gained greater acceptance in Alberta gift shops and galleries.

Ceramic Arts served as an important proving ground for many artists and artisans from the 1950s through the 1970s. However, it was not particularly successful from a financial standpoint, and finally closed down in 1978.⁹ It paved the way for several other commercial studios in the 1970s, including Stonecrop Pottery in Canmore, Pottery West in Edmonton, and JBK Pottery Ltd. in Calgary.¹⁰

PLAINSMAN CLAY LTD. ♦

Luke Lindoe left Calgary in 1957 to work for Medicine Hat Brick & Tile. As Director of Research and Mining, he was responsible for exploration and development of raw materials as well as for quality control. Between 1957 and 1967, he located and tested clay deposits in Manitoba and in the Cypress Hills south of Medicine Hat.¹¹ His work was directed towards supplying the brick and tile company, but he also handled numerous requests from schools and individuals requesting clay for making pottery. Medicine Hat Brick & Tile supplied a limited quantity of dry clay for these customers, but it was not a sideline the company was interested in pursuing. Lindoe knew from his own experience teaching pottery at the Alberta College of Art that it was extremely difficult to locate clay suppliers. In fact, his main source of supply was crock breakage from Medalta Potteries.¹²

In 1964, Lindoe founded Plainsman Clay with his wife, Gail. The company was set up to provide processed clay mixtures, packaged as wet or dry compounds, for sale to potters, pottery schools, and hobbyists. The importance of Lindoe's involvement lay in his familiarity with local clay resources and his commitment to quality. As one of the company brochures explained:

Excellent raw materials do not in themselves make an excellent clay body. Only with the application of experience, engineering excellence and concern for processing can otherwise incomplete raw materials be combined to form a clay body that harmonizes the users' needs with the clay bodies' potential.¹³

⁸*Ibid.*, p.13.

⁹*Alberta Clay comes of age* (Edmonton: Alberta Potters Association / Alberta Art Foundation, 1986) p.115.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp.14-16.

¹¹Mirielle Keeling, *op. cit.*, p.104.

¹²*Studio Ceramics in Alberta I*, p.11.

¹³Cited in Mirielle Keeling, *op. cit.*, p.101.

In 1971, John Porter was hired to manage the company. Porter, who completed his original training in England, had managed Ceramic Arts Calgary and Sunburst Ceramics Ltd. between 1960 and 1971. His business experience was a useful addition to Plainsman Clay's operations.¹⁴ By 1973, Plainsman was shipping five million pounds of clay to workshops all across Canada.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Lindoe continued to pursue his other interests. He pursued his own artistic career while teaching ceramics at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, and working as a freelance geological consultant for I-XL Industries (formerly Medicine Hat Brick & Tile). In 1980 Lindoe sold Plainsman to a Montreal group represented by Normand Poulin, who became the manager.¹⁶ Four years later, the company was acquired by I-XL Industries who introduced new methods of clay processing, and developed new products for the clay community.¹⁷

THE CLAY PRODUCTS INDUSTRY ♦

The Canadian clay products industry was not affected to the same degree by the factors which undermined the pottery industry. Although costs for labour and supplies rose in the years following World War II, the industry's ability to expand was not hampered by the foreign competition which decimated Canadian potteries. Manufacturers of brick, tile and pipe continued to see steady growth throughout the post-war period. Canadian sales increased from almost \$18 million in 1948 to over \$42 million in 1959, with Alberta sales rising by 75% from \$2 million to over \$3.5 million.¹⁸

Alberta Clay Products and Medicine Hat Brick & Tile entered the post-war period on a fairly equal footing. However, a major difference between the two companies became apparent in the 1950s. Alberta Clay Products adopted a heavy dividend policy some time after Harry Yuill's death in 1944. Between 1950 and 1954, the company paid out in dividends more than it earned: the excess was over \$21,000 and amounted to an overrun of about 6%. As a result, Alberta Clay Products was unable to make even basic improvements to its facilities.¹⁹ In contrast to this approach, Medicine Hat Brick & Tile entered a period of steady modernization and expansion following World War II. In the fall of 1953, it installed the first continuous-firing tunnel kiln for brick and tile in Alberta.²⁰

¹⁴Interview with Luke Lindoe, Medicine Hat (November 11, 1992).

¹⁵Luke Orton Lindoe, Artist File (Visual Arts Branch, Alberta Culture).

¹⁶Mirielle Keeling, *op. cit.*, p.106.

¹⁷*Alberta Clay comes of age*, p.118.

¹⁸Figures from *The Clay and Clay Products Industry in Canada* Department of Trade and Commerce, Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Ottawa).

¹⁹"Alberta Clay Products Ltd. Advantages of Sale" (CPIC Archives, Yuill Papers).

²⁰"Medicine Hat Brick and Tile Ltd. Celebrates 50th Year of Operations," *Medicine Hat News* October 1, 1963.

In 1955, Alberta Clay Products and Medicine Hat Potteries were acquired by Marwell Construction in Vancouver. The new owners retained the pottery plant, but immediately sold the sewer pipe division to Evans Coleman Evans, also of Vancouver.²¹ In 1960, Medicine Hat Brick & Tile bought the company, operating it until 1961 when it was consumed by a devastating fire. Of the enormous factory complex, only four beehive kilns survived.²²

Alberta Clay Products was only one of the companies acquired by Medicine Hat Brick & Tile in this period. In 1959, it bought National Porcelain, operating it until 1974 when it too was destroyed by fire.²³ By 1963, Medicine Hat Brick & Tile had six large plants in Alberta: two in Redcliff, three in Medicine Hat and one in Edmonton. The company's products included brick, sewer pipe and fittings, flue lining, porcelain insulators, and tile.²⁴ Between 1965 and 1980, it continued expanding into Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Montana. The head office and research laboratory were maintained in Medicine Hat.²⁵

In 1971, Medicine Hat Brick & Tile changed its name to reflect the diverse operations which it controlled. The new name, I-XL Industries, derived from the I-XL trademark used on bricks manufactured at the Redcliff Pressed Brick Company founded by Herbert Sissons and his associates in 1912.²⁶ Since that time, Sisson's enterprise had followed a methodical pattern of growth: his company developed from the small Redcliff brickyard to become the largest manufacturer of clay products in western Canada. I-XL is presently the sole survivor of Medicine Hat's clay products industry. It is interesting to note that I-XL can trace its corporate roots back to Medicine Hat's first brickyard, originally opened by Ben McCord in 1885.

THE HERITAGE OF MEDICINE HAT'S CLAY PRODUCTS INDUSTRY ♦

From 1885 to the present day, the clay products industry has enjoyed varying degrees of success in Medicine Hat. The pottery industry was part of that story, from John McIntyre's factory in 1912 to Harry Veiner's in 1989. With the closing of Hycroft China, the economic significance of Medicine Hat's potteries faded into obscurity. However, in

²¹Kathleen Dirk, *op. cit.*, p.14.

²²Photographs of fire damage in 1961 (MHM&AG Archives P442).

²³"I-XL: The First Fifty Years" (MHM&AG Archives M83.15.19). Following the fire at National Porcelain, the company's former plant superintendent established another electrical porcelain plant in Medicine Hat called the Independent Porcelain Company Limited. It began production in 1976 (Mirielle Keeling, *op. cit.* p.49).

²⁴*Medicine Hat News*, October 1, 1963.

²⁵Mirielle Keeling, *op. cit.*, pp.49-50.

²⁶"I-XL: The First Fifty Years" (MHM&AG Archives M83.15.19).

terms of industrial heritage, Medicine Hat has steadily been gaining recognition for its rich history of pottery manufacturing. In a final twist, the abandoned factory buildings are becoming part of the City's cultural tourism industry.

When Medalta Potteries closed down in 1954, its wares rapidly became collectible. In 1974, Richard and Jean Symonds gave collecting a boost when they published a guide book called *Medalta Stoneware and Pottery for Collectors*. By 1994, collectors were interested in virtually all the potteries which had operated in Medicine Hat and Redcliff. But while Medalta's wares were gaining in interest and value on the antique market, the buildings where the historic wares had been produced were slowly sliding into ruin.

When does a derelict factory become a national cultural resource? During the early 1970s, a group of Medicine Hat residents set a goal of gaining official recognition for the historical significance of their city's pottery industry. In 1974, they formed the Friends of Medalta Society. Since that time, the Society has undertaken a systematic program aimed at documenting and preserving the industrial heritage of pottery and clay products manufacturing. Targetted sites included the Medalta Potteries complex, the Hycroft China factory, and the two remaining kilns from Alberta Clay Products.

Medalta Potteries was granted provincial designation as a heritage site in 1976, and national designation through the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1985. Hycroft China was designated as a provincial historic resource in 1995. Together with the beehive kilns, these structures are characteristic examples of industrial buildings from the twentieth century. The Hycroft China building has seen little structural alteration since it was built in 1937. Much of the original equipment is still on the floor – in fact, jackets of former employees are still hanging on hooks at the rear of the factory, with their boots left underneath. The Medalta factory complex has suffered considerable deterioration and damage over the years, but the remaining buildings preserve a unique and remarkable heritage:

The surviving building fabric, site features and interior industrial components... represent the most extensive *in situ* resources directly associated with the history of this industrial activity in Canada. The collective value of the resources lies in their expression of an evolving manufacturing process rather than with a specific time or phase in the plant's history.²⁷

Active preservation of these historic buildings has been ongoing since 1988, when major repairs to the south walls of Medalta Potteries were undertaken. An interpretive centre opened in the same year, with displays and walking tours designed to inform visitors about clay products manufacturing in Medicine Hat. In 1994, the displays were moved into the partially-restored Hycroft China factory where they were expanded into

²⁷ Simpson Roberts Wappell, *Medalta Potteries Conservation Report* (Rev. January 1995) p.16.

an award-winning exhibit.²⁸ In 1996, close to 9,000 visitors saw the exhibit and toured through the building.²⁹ In 1997, the Medalta site was opened to the public for the first time since the plant's closure, and interpretive displays have since been installed.

The pottery industry is entering a new phase in Medicine Hat. No longer part of the manufacturing economy, the factory buildings are gaining a new lease on life as interpretive centres. Some of the tools and machinery have been restored for use in demonstrations, and the old jigger wheels are turning once again.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE IN PERSPECTIVE ♦

The preservation and interpretation of industrial sites is based on an understanding of their original contexts. Without context, outdated buildings and machinery survive as intriguing but largely irrelevant curiosities. However, by placing them within a broader social and economic setting these artifacts are empowered to illuminate history, revitalize the processes that once animated their factory surroundings, and help modern visitors touch the face of the past. By understanding the factors that contributed to the industry's success, we develop a richer understanding of Alberta's economic development in the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly, by understanding why the industry failed we can better understand the subtleties of economic change.

What initially caused the pottery industry in Alberta to reach such prominence? And what led to its virtual disappearance? The answer lies in a combination of various factors: raw materials, markets, personalities, war, labour unrest, and competition. Unique as these factors are in their influence on the pottery industry, it is still possible to see parallels to the 'boom and bust' cycle of Alberta's economic history.

The pottery industry's initial 'boom' was directly related to the cheapness and ready availability of raw materials. High demand for products coupled with a certain indifference to quality on the part of consumers allowed the industry to take off. Bolstered by an artificial demand created during World War II, pottery production peaked in 1946 before entering an initially gradual decline. In the final analysis, the 'bust' resulted from dependence on external markets. Out-competed by manufacturers in the United States, Britain, and Japan, Medicine Hat entrepreneurs either saw the writing on the wall by the early 1950s or were caught in the crisis as the industry began to crumble. Several efforts to rebuild the industry on a significantly smaller scale ensued in the 1960s and 1970s before it faded into obscurity in 1991.

For almost half a century, Medicine Hat's pottery industry was a major economic influence, both locally and nationally. Medalta Potteries on its own was the principal

²⁸The Friends of Medalta Society received an Award of Merit from the Alberta Museums Association in 1995 for their exhibit, "The Great Wall of China."

²⁹From visitor statistics compiled by the Friends of Medalta Society, 1997.

employer for the City, and supplied crockery and tableware to households and restaurants across Canada. From 1915 to 1955, pottery production exemplified the potential of successful secondary manufacturing in Alberta. Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries, together with the other smaller potteries which started up in the communities of Medicine Hat and Redcliff, are part of a broader historical picture. Each one played a role in Alberta's continuing efforts to diversify its economy. The unique use of natural resources, the production of serviceable and useful items for a well-defined market, and the willingness to flex in response to changing customer preferences allowed the industry to develop successfully. Increased labour and production costs and shifts in the international market placed inexorable pressures on the industry. Even astute and experienced managers could not withstand the impact of change. The demise of the industry represented not so much the shifts and struggles of business cycles, or the personal errors of individual managers, as it did the passing of an era in Canadian manufacturing.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF POTTERIES

The potteries located in Medicine Hat and Redcliff formed the centre of Alberta's pottery production in the twentieth century. While more than a dozen separate companies established in the area, they only used four industrial sites. In some cases, companies simply reincorporated and changed their names. In others, new companies set up virtually on the heels of ones that went bankrupt, and took over their facilities and equipment. The following chart helps to clarify these rather confusing transitions.

MEDALTA FACTORY (MEDICINE HAT)

1912-14	Medicine Hat Pottery Company Ltd.
1915-24	Medalta Stoneware Ltd.
1924-54	Medalta Potteries Ltd.
1958	New Medalta Ceramics
1960-66	Sunburst Ceramics Ltd. (1975)

W. L. CLARK'S FACTORY (MEDICINE HAT)

1916-22	Gas City Pottery Ltd.
1922-24	Canada Pottery

ALBERTA POTTERIES FACTORY (REDCLIFF)

1931-36	Alberta Potteries Ltd. (Wyatt)
1936-38	Alberta Potteries Ltd. (Perry and Matuska)
1939	Provincial Industrial Enterprises
1941-66	Alberta Potteries Ltd. (Yuill)
1966-86	Medalta Potteries (1966) Ltd.

MEDICINE HAT POTTERIES' FACTORY (MEDICINE HAT)

1938-55	Medicine Hat Potteries
1955-91	Hycroft China Ltd.

GLOSSARY

Advertiques – pottery wares used in co-operative advertising ventures, where a corporate customer's name and slogan were printed on small functional pottery items such as pitchers, bowls, teapots or measuring cups. Advertiques were given away as promotional items with the corporate customer's products; for example, a person purchasing Ogilvie's flour would receive a measuring cup manufactured by Medalta with Ogilvie's name printed on it. Medalta and Medicine Hat Potteries both made advertiques for clients as far away as Montreal; prominent local clients for Medalta included Ogilvie's Flour (Medicine Hat) and Toshach's Dry Goods Store (Drumheller).

Artwares – decorative wares such as vases, lamp bases, figurines, and wall plaques. In 1929, Medalta established an Art Department for designing and manufacturing artwares. Decorative techniques included coloured glazes and lacquers, moulding, incision, stencils, decals, and stamps. Medicine Hat Potteries also produced a limited range of artwares.

Ball clay – an extremely fine-grained, very plastic clay which fires to a cream colour. It is too fine to be used without non-plastic additions. The term derives from the practice of digging "balls" of clay from open pits of a convenient size for carrying, 20 to 30 pounds.

Ball mill – a machine for making glaze. Porcelain balls tumbling in a rotating barrel crush glaze particles to produce a milky solution. The mixing process takes from 12 to 24 hours.

Bisque – term used to describe pottery which has been fired once, but not yet glazed. Bisque firing (done at a lower temperature than glaze firing) makes the pottery less fragile without changing its porosity. It is consequently easier to glaze, because the clay surface is hard but porous and allows the glaze to adhere.

Blunger – a mixing machine with revolving paddles or blades used to prepare large quantities of slip or glaze. Raw and processed clays are combined with powdered silica, feldspar, sodium silicate (an electrolyte) and water to produce a clay-and-water suspension called slip. The sodium silicate supplies sodium ions which charge the clay particles and cause them to repel each other; this makes it possible to greatly reduce the amount of water required.

Bone china – a pure white ware which contains as an ingredient in its porcelain composition the ash of calcined bones. Originating in England, the process of incorporating bone ash in pottery was patented in 1748. Bone china is softer than porcelain, but durable and less expensive to manufacture. The calcium in the bones provided a flux for the clay body. Bone china is still manufactured today, but using calcium from mineral deposits rather than bones.

Ceramics – products made from a nonmetallic mineral compound (especially clay) and fired to set the shape. Principal types of ceramic wares are porcelain, earthenware, and bisque.

Clay – a stiff, fine-grained viscous earth found in many varieties; made up of hydrated silicates of aluminum. It is produced by the weather-induced decomposition of certain rocks, primarily feldspar. Many different rock minerals act as primary sources of the material ultimately to become clay. The proportion of individual minerals present in the clay depends on their natural abundance. Clay bodies differ in plasticity, because they contain varying amounts of water. In general, very plastic or “fat” clays shrink more than the dry or lean clays which contain more silica.

Cones – carefully prepared material that bends after a given amount of firing, and serves as a gauge of the kiln's temperature.

Crazing – a defect where a network of hairline cracks forms; occurs when the clay body expands more than the glaze, causing the glaze to pull apart and crack.

Crock ware – term for utilitarian stoneware pieces such as crocks, butter churns, jars and mixing bowls. During the 1920s and 1930s, crockery was the mainstay of Medalta's production and accounted for 75% of the pottery manufactured in Canada. Crockery was designed for ordinary household use and, because it was so well used, few Medalta pieces are found today.

Deflocculant – a substance which, when added to a mixture of ceramic materials and water, causes the mass to become more fluid (e.g., sodium silicate – see Blunger).

Down draft kiln – a kiln where the heat rises to the top of the interior and then descends through openings in the floor. A system of burners and fireboxes around the kiln allows for even application of heat. The heat rises to the crown, then draws down (hence “down draft”) through the perforated floor and into the chimney. The down draft kilns at Medalta, designed for pottery, had a centre chimney rising up through the crown of the kiln. The down draft kilns at Alberta Clay Products, known as “salt kilns” because they were used for firing salt glaze sewer pipes, ran their flues underground to an isolated chimney serving two or four kilns.

Feldspar – a variety of crystalline rock which forms into clay as it decomposes. Feldspars are also added to clay bodies as a source of flux. Feldspar used in Medicine Hat was supplied from Quebec.

Filter cakes – cakes of clay removed from the filter press.

Filter press – a machine for de-watering clay, consisting of an accordion-like set of canvas bags through which slip is pumped. When the pressure is released the clay is removed as filter cakes. Typically 80% of the water added to clay in the blunger is removed in the filter press.

Firebrick – brick made from fire clay; used for lining furnaces and for other applications where high temperatures are to be resisted.

Fire clay – a clay body with a high alumina content; usually fires tan or grey and is used in manufacturing materials such as bricks and muffles for industrial kilns and furnaces.

Firing – the process of applying controlled and sustained heat to clay or clay and glazes in some form of kiln. Three firing processes are normally used in the industrial production of pottery wares. Bisque firing is the first stage, which transforms clay into permanent pottery. Glaze or gloss firing is normally a second firing after the bisque ware has been glazed; it fuses the glaze to the pottery. A third firing is used when gilding is applied to the glazed ware.

Flint – a source of pure silica. It is calcined (de-hydrated) in kilns and ground to a fine powder (silica). Flint gives strength and solidity to clay bodies and prevents shrinkage and warping.

Flux – any material used to lower the melting point of another material.

Glaze – a continuous layer of glass coating the surface of a ceramic. Glazes have compositions similar to those of other glasses except that more alumina is added to make them less fluid at high temperatures; this prevents the glaze from flowing down the wall of the pottery and pooling at its base. The glaze provides a hard, non-absorbent, easily cleaned surface and allows for a variety of surface colours; it also adds strength to the wares and prevents chipping. Glazes are usually applied by painting, pouring, dipping, or spraying.

Glazing table – a moveable mesh table with an attached bin for catching excess glaze; used for drying wares which have been dipped in liquid glaze.

Grog – fired and ground fire clay which is added to clay bodies to minimize shrinkage, give extra strength to the clay body, and improve its colour and texture.

Jiggering – a method for moulding hollow ware and flat ware. Soft clay is squeezed between a profiled metal tool (template) and a revolving plaster mould. As the mould turns, the template trims off the excess clay. The face of a plate or saucer is formed by the mould, while the shape of the back and thickness are controlled by the template.

Kaolin – a fine clay used primarily in porcelain manufacture, although it is sometimes used in earthenware. It is named for a mine site (Kaoling, meaning 'high ridge') in China where this type of clay was first found. The term kaolin is used to refer to white-burning clays. Kaolin used in Medicine Hat was imported from Georgia.

Lacquer wares – pottery decorated with coloured lacquers. Lacquers were applied directly to bisque ware and did not require an extra firing. Both stencilled and hand-painted designs were produced at Medalta.

Magnetic separator – an electro-magnet used to remove iron particles from slip. Metallic particles, if not removed, cause dark specks on the finished ware.

Mangle dryer – a dryer where formed clay items in their plaster moulds are placed. Conveyor belts move the pieces through the dryer chamber. By the time the pieces reach the far end of the chamber, they are dried to the leather-hard stage, and are ready to be removed from the moulds for glazing.

Miller machine – an automatic dish-making machine. Prepared clay is forced onto moulds which are moved continuously on conveyor belts. The clay items, still in their moulds, are trimmed by hand and then mechanically transported to the dryer. Drying begins slowly under infra red bulbs, and is later accelerated by the use of hot air piped in directly from the tunnel kiln. The Miller machine was capable of producing approximately 9,000 plates in an 8-hour shift.

Mould – a form made from plaster used for slip casting; slip is poured into the mould and allowed to dry, forming pottery pieces ready for bisque firing. Literally hundreds of working moulds can be cast from a single solid-plaster "master". A large number of moulds is necessary for the jiggering process, as pieces cannot be removed from the moulds until they have dried. The master mould is coated with a soap solution to seal the plaster surface.

Plaster of Paris – a fine white plaster consisting of anhydrous calcium sulfate (derived from gypsum, a natural mineral). When mixed with water, the plaster re-hydrates, stiffening and presently "setting" to a solid mass. Plaster of Paris was used for making the moulds and masters. Because it can be shaped easily and absorbs moisture, it is ideal for casting work.

Porcelain – a ceramic ware which originated in China, generally white and translucent when fired.

Pug mill – used for re-mixing the filter cakes. Rotating blades in the primary chamber mix the clay; the secondary chamber employs a vacuum to remove air pockets and an auger to compress and knit the clay into a homogenous mass. The extruded clay is ready for making pottery.

Ram press – a method of forming simple shapes by the use of moulds in hydraulic presses. Male and female moulds form the shape and use great pressure to squeeze out the excess clay.

Sagger – a box-like container in which pottery is fired. Saggars protect the ware from dirt, furnace gases, uneven heating, and thermal shock.

Salt glazing – a technique where damp salt is introduced into the kiln at stoneware firing temperatures (1100 degrees Celcius/2013 degrees Fahrenheit). The salt vaporizes in the heat, releasing sodium which combines with the silica in the clay to produce a glassy covering. In the process the inside of the kiln and the kiln furniture also become salt glazed, and highly toxic hydrochloric acid fumes are given off into the atmosphere. The salt used for glazing in the down draft kilns at Alberta Clay Products came from Moosejaw, Saskatchewan.

Sanitary ware – a term used in the pottery industry to describe toilets, sinks, urinals, and similar wares.

Silica – common name for silicon dioxide, found in nature as the mineral quartz or as flint nodules. Glass is mainly comprised of silicates, which are the principal constituent of ceramics. The major source of silica for the Medicine Hat potteries was Illinois. It was prepared by grinding almost pure flint sand.

Slip – clay in liquid suspension, used in slip casting.

Slip casting – a method of making pottery by filling plaster moulds with liquefied clay (slip). The plaster mould acts as a sponge, sucking water out of the slip, and building up a clay wall following the contours of the mould. The clay layer at the wall gradually stiffens as it dries; then the mould is inverted and the remaining liquid slip poured out, leaving a hollow form. The process became widespread in the nineteenth century.

Stilt – a ceramic tripod on which glazed pottery is placed when returned to the kiln for glaze firing.

Stoneware – a clay body similar to porcelain which fires to form a strong, high-density, impermeable, grey-coloured ware. Stoneware clays were used in Medicine Hat to manufacture industrial ceramics (tiles, sewer pipes) and crock ware (crocks, churns, mixing bowls).

Throwing – the process of forming pottery wares by hand on a revolving potter's wheel. The jiggering process is based on the technology of the potter's wheel and the technique of hand-throwing.

Tunnel kiln – a kiln in which wares to be fired are conveyed through a variably heated chamber. Kiln cars loaded with saggers move slowly through the kiln chamber. They are subjected to a gradual temperature increase until they reach the peak firing heat; then the temperature decreases until they exit at the end of the kiln – the wares emerge fired, cooled and ready to be packed. Depending on the items, firing and cooling took from 36 to 48 hours. Medicine Hat Potteries used a circular tunnel kiln which was constructed when the factory was built in 1937. Medalta had a tunnel kiln installed in 1942, and a second larger tunnel kiln added in 1947.

Updraft kiln – the simplest form of kiln; essentially a fire at floor level or lower. The flame and hot gases rise through the wares to a vent at the top.

Vitrification – term used to describe the conversion of clay into a glasslike substance. Stoneware and porcelain clays vitrify when fired; the surface becomes hard glassy, and impermeable. Earthenware clay remains porous when fired, and requires a glaze to become vitrified.

White ware – pottery wares with a white or cream-coloured body. The term "white ware" is used as a general term to refer to dishes and other similar wares of a finer grade than crock ware.

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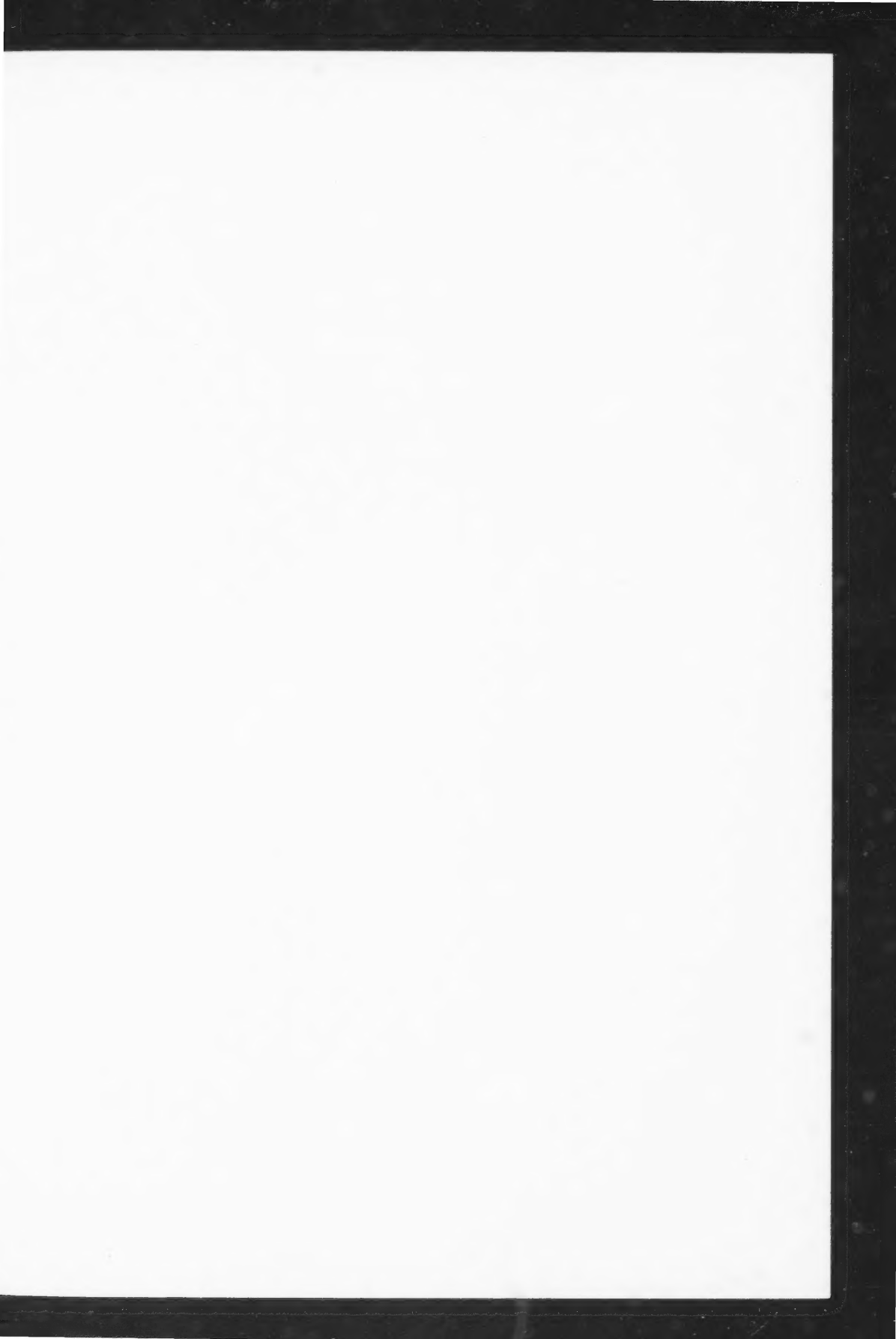
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THE ALBERTA POTTERY INDUSTRY, 1912-1990 A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

This study of the history of pottery production in Medicine Hat, Alberta covers the years 1912 to 1990. It emphasizes the height of the industry's development and success from 1915 to 1960, and focusses on the economic and social impact of the industry both locally and nationally. As a study of material history, it examines the pottery industry's output, plant processes, and the people who made and used these products.

This book traces the factors that affected the emergence, success, tribulations, and demise of pottery production in Alberta in the context of the province's economic history. At the same time, it portrays the human side of the pottery story: rivalry and espionage among those who founded the factories, the successes and failures of scientists who struggled to perfect pottery materials and manufacturing processes, and the daily lives of workers and entrepreneurs within the pottery industry.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Hayward's study of Alberta potteries was born of an interest in material culture and labour history. She was curator of the Glenbow Museum's travelling exhibition *Medalta Ware*, and developed curatorial and interpretive materials for the Clay Products Interpretive Centre in Medicine Hat.

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